

Cuba and Human Rights

Fidel Castro recalls his discussions with former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien

By [Fidel Castro Ruz](#)

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

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Dear Randy,

I was very moved by the extraordinary documentary of Argentinean filmmaker Carolina Silvestre, which dissects the lies about democracy and human rights advanced by developed and globalized capitalism.

For days, following the Venezuelan referendum of December 2, going over the hundreds of pronouncements that I have made as part of my revolutionary efforts, I had been trying to bring to mind a statement that concretely defines our position on Cuba's international commitments.

I asked for copies of several materials in which I tackled the issue. Fortunately, one of the most precise statements I made on a Round Table program. It was relatively recent, slightly less than seven years ago.

We are involved in an electoral process. I consider ideas to be the basis of my political life. I would use the closing remarks of this material, whose text I am sending you, as the title: "History will decide who is right".

I ask that you broadcast it, if possible, on Thursday, tomorrow.

My remarks were inspired by the statement made by then Prime Minister of Canada Jean Chretien at the 3rd Summit of the Americas.

At the time, they may have seemed of little significance.

Fidel Castro Ruz

December 13, 2007

Fraternal greetings to all Round Table participants. Thanking you in advance for your prompt response,

Fidel Castro.

RESPONSE BY PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, TO A QUESTION POSED BY THE MODERATOR OF A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON A STATEMENT MADE BY CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRÉTIEN DURING THE III SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Fidel Castro.- Very well, and now, I will ask for your patience. This document might be of interest, if you will give me the floor.

I felt it would be worth devoting a few minutes to this matter.

Were you going to talk about the host country?

Randy Alonso.- About the host country of the 3rd Summit and about the statements made by its prime minister. There were various statements made by the prime minister, and by the foreign minister as well.

Fidel Castro.- Yes, I chose one of the statements made by the prime minister, because he is the one I know better, and the one I have more of a friendship with.

Well, so that the people understand what this is all about.

“Quebec city (Canada), April 19 (EFE).- Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien justified the exclusion of Cuba from the III Summit of the Americas citing the Cuban regime’s failure to take any action in regards to human rights, despite the fact that he had ‘spent hours trying to convince’ Fidel Castro to change his policies.

“Upon arriving at the convention center in Quebec City where the summit will take place this weekend, Chrétien was asked whether he had changed his position on the inclusion of Cuba in the Summit of the Americas process, given that at previous meetings in Miami and Santiago he had advocated the presence of the Castro regime.

“‘I have not changed my opinion,’ Chrétien answered.

“The Canadian Prime Minister was curt when asked if Cuba was not present in Quebec City because of Washington’s refusal.

“Likewise, when pressed to indicate what other country on the continent had opposed Castro’s participation in the third Americas Summit, Chrétien told the journalist, ‘ask them.’

“The Canadian prime minister added that he had spent ‘hours and hours trying to persuade Castro’ to sign some conventions on human rights, but that there had been no action on the part of the Cuban regime.

“‘I spent hours with him (Fidel Castro) trying to get him to sign some United Nations resolutions,’ Chrétien insisted.”



I have reflected a great deal on this pronouncement of Mr. Chrétien. I felt no need to issue a hasty and improvised public statement on that meeting.

Instead, I have spent time collecting information and reconstructing as objectively as possible what we discussed and the atmosphere in which our exchanges took place.

I have brought with me a written reflection, given the need for precision when approaching such delicate subjects.



The meeting had barely begun when he rather abruptly placed a short list of names on the table, a list that he had obviously received shortly before. I could almost guess what it was. This was what usually happened whenever we were visited by a political figure from a U.S. ally or an American politician: the State Department would hand them a list of people tried in a court of law or sentenced for counterrevolutionary activities.

Those who were of greatest importance or interest to the U.S. intelligence services or government always headed up the lists. They would ask for the individuals on the list to be pardoned or released. It was a tactic consistently used by the U.S. government to apply pressure in favor of its friends, taking advantage of any friendly visit to Cuba. Because our country normally exercises the greatest tolerance possible, it is only in exceptional cases that the authorities proceed to arrest and prosecute those involved, when their acts of provocation are grave or totally unacceptable.

The Canadian prime minister reminded me that, as a result of the Pope's visit, a number of individuals sentenced for their counterrevolutionary activities had been pardoned, and he said he had pledged to request the same for those on the list.

In fact, the Pope never raised this subject with me; he did it through his Secretary of State, in another meeting with our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Without waiting for a response, he immediately proposed that Cuba sign the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, since Cuba had done just as much or

more than any other country in the world in this regard. This was undoubtedly a complimentary phrase, and a more clever and opportune approach.

I recall that he then went on to mention the North American Free Trade Agreement among Canada, Mexico and the United States, and the plans to extend it to the rest of Latin America, expressing his view that Cuba could make an important contribution.

Lastly, he referred to the treaty against anti-personal landmines, lamenting that Cuba had not yet signed it, and requesting that it do so. These were the four points with which he opened the talks. They all seemed very simple. All four, however, were extremely complex.

I asked him if it was common for Canadian politicians to begin by the most difficult questions, and jokingly added that we might be spoiling the visit if we did not do well on this initial test.

I seem to remember that the meeting lasted around two hours and that it unfolded in an atmosphere that was cordial and respectful but franc, too. I must confess that I used most of the time since I needed to present in considerable depth the rationale behind our positions, especially with regard to three of the points.

It would be impossible to repeat here each one of these arguments. I will limit myself to a very brief summary, with the essential points.

I said that I could not decide anything personally and immediately, or commit myself on any of the issues, or raise false expectations concerning the decisions we would adopt. I said that the highly publicized matter of alleged prisoners of conscience was an old story after almost 40 years of all kinds of misdeeds and crimes committed against Cuba by the United States. I listed them in depth and in detail, contrasting them with the irreproachable conduct and ethics of our Revolution despite the deluge of slander and lies heaped on Cuba. I spoke of the hypocrisy and double standards reflected in the United States' policy towards Cuba, and the circumstances that had obliged us to have people in prison; at the Bay of Pigs alone, we had taken 1200 invaders prisoner. I explained that the Revolution itself, from the very first years, had been releasing those who had tried to destroy it serving the interests of a foreign power over the course of four decades. I noted that the issue of those who were currently in prison for this reason was constantly used to pressure Cuba, a country suffering hostility and aggression from abroad. I described the serious threats we still faced, such as the acts of terrorism organized and financed by the United States.

At one point he told me that his desire was for this situation to be overcome, in order for us to return to the big family. I told him that we were Latin Americans, and I asked him if it was a matter of us returning to the big family, or of the big family returning to us. I concluded on this point by telling him that he had brought a list of individuals who were mercenaries in the service of the United States and paid by the United States, who were trying to destroy the Revolution in complicity with the United States. I said that I had to tell him as a friend that such a list was humiliating for Cuba. He took pains to explain that this was not his intent, and said that perhaps he had presented the list much too soon.

It was not all dramatic. There were moments of humor and even jokes interspersed. This part of the exchange, recounted somewhat extensively, reflects the intensity of our first hour of talks.

With regard to his emphasis on the hemispheric family, I told him that it pleased me greatly, but that I also thought about the world family: Europe, Asia and Africa.

With regard to the second point, the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, I did not hesitate to point out that we could sign all of the articles except two, articles 8 and 13. The first, I said, may be well and good for capitalist countries like Canada, the United States, and the countries of Latin American, since some are ruled by businesses and oligarchies, and the others by the big transnationals. In countries like those, workers are divided, fractured and, when possible, corrupted and alienated, and can accomplish very little in the face of the political power of their bosses. It is a question of economic systems different from ours.

This article of the Covenant refers to the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice, subject only to the rules of the organization concerned, for the promotion and protection of their economic and social interests. Now, in a socialist country like Cuba, where manual and intellectual workers are all organized in their respective trade unions and solidly united as a revolutionary class that shares power with the rest of the people, with the peasants, women, students, neighborhood residents and citizens in general, such a precept could serve as a weapon and a pretext for imperialism to try to divide and fracture the workers, create artificial unions, and decrease their political and social power and influence. In the United States and many countries in Europe and other parts of the world, the strategy used by imperialism is to divide, weaken and corrupt the trade union movement to the point where it is completely defenseless against the bosses. In Cuba, it would be used fundamentally for subversive and destabilizing purposes, to undermine the political power and diminish the extraordinary strength and influence of our workers, and to erode the heroic resistance of the only socialist state in the West in the face of the hegemonic superpower.

The other article could not be signed either, because it would open the doors to the privatization of education. In the past, that gave rise to painful differences and intolerable privileges and injustices, including racial discrimination, something our children will never again have to face. A country that managed to eradicate illiteracy in just one year, that has achieved an average educational level of ninth grade, and that has an extraordinary and massive contingent of professors and teachers and the most sound and successful educational system in the world does not need to commit itself to such a precept.

I told Chrétien that Latin America had been trying to eradicate illiteracy for 200 years, and have still not succeeded.

Chrétien proposed that we sign the Covenant and state our reservation with regard to the two articles in question. We responded that afterwards there would be talk of non-compliance with the Covenant, and nobody would know about or remember the reservations with which it was signed. You cannot play around with these things!

With regard to the Treaty on landmines, we did not spend much time on the subject during that meeting. I told him that we were not going to sign it. I explained that we had an U.S. military base right in our own territory, and that the only landmines in our country were between the limits of that base and the rest of our territory. For us, I said, landmines were a defensive weapon, and we would not make the mistake of giving them up; we do not have nuclear weapons, intelligent bombs and missiles, and the other highly sophisticated

weapons that the United States has. A genuine threat hangs over our country, and this is why we do not intend to sign the treaty.

He later broached the subject once again, from an angle that I never would have suspected at the time. At the end of this first meeting he told me, with obvious satisfaction and sincerity, that it had been an excellent discussion. This summary of the main points addressed at our first meeting might give the impression that it took place in a gruff atmosphere, but nothing could be further from the truth. The atmosphere was warm and friendly at all times.

It seemed clear to me –although he did not state it like that but I picked it up from the whole of what Mr. Chrétien said– that in the presence of such a powerful neighbor, with which it shares an 8,644 kilometer-long border, he feared for the future of his country. Being aware of their strong and deeply rooted –but also different– cultures and traditions he is concerned about the risk posed to his country’s unity by any ambitions, errors or upheavals on the part of its neighbor. For this enormous and rich territory, with a population of hardly 32 million, whose natural resources include –as Chrétien himself indicated– one quarter of the world’s drinking water reserves, the United States constitutes a major headache, perhaps even more so than it does for Cuba.

At what was perhaps the most interesting point of the conversation, when Chrétien stated his most intelligent idea, capable of inspiring a sense of solidarity even in a listener with a considerably different ideology, he said that he had been opposed to the idea of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States alone. At least a third party had to be found, and that third party ended up being Mexico, with which Canada often shares stances vis à vis the United States’ maneuvers. He also said that in the year 2005 there would be 34, and hopefully 35 (an obvious reference to Cuba), to balance the United States power.

At one point he told me that Canada was extremely sensitive about its independence with regard to the United States, that it was very important for it to preserve its independence from the United States, and that its policy was to sustain close and friendly but very independent relations with that country. He proudly informed me that Canada was now competing with the Silicon Valley in California, where all the high technology is produced.

The second meeting with Chrétien and his delegation took place at night. There was a dinner, and a broader exchange. At a certain point, when the subject arose of the plot to assassinate me on Margarita Island, a plot organized by the infamous Cuban-American National Foundation, he commented that this was often the cause of major difficulties; the incident with the aircraft, he said, was aimed at creating a problem when the U.S. government was ready to take a positive step in relation to Cuba. I then described to him about the Cuban Adjustment Act, and its absurd and irrational consequences.

We also discussed the Helms-Burton Act. He told me that the United States is totally isolated with regard to this legislation. He said that he personally was the first to issue a statement after it was passed. He was meeting with the Prime ministers of the Caribbean at the time, and together they issued the first declaration against the Helms-Burton Act.

As for the incident with the aircraft in 1996, used as justification for the signing of the Helms-Burton Act, I told him that he could find an almost complete account of the incident in the January 26, 1998 edition of *The New Yorker*.

When he asked me about the FTAA, I told him that we would have to be patient, and wait to see what happened in Latin America with this Free Trade Agreement, what the consequences would be not only for our countries, but also for the rest of the world, as well as the tricks that would be used to impose a Multilateral Agreement on Investments. I also said that these issues are a source of deep concern to us and they should be thoroughly studied. I talked to him about concrete aspects of our economy, and the measures adopted to cope with the special period. I pointed out that it would be impossible for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to do without tariffs, because some of them obtain up to 80% of their budgetary revenues this way. When I asked him if Canada was harmed in any way by European integration and the creation of the Euro currency, he said that it was not because 82% of Canada's trade is with the United States amounting to 1 billion per day.

For my part, I told him frankly that I believed the Latin America countries would benefit from the success of European integration and European competition with the United States for markets and investments in Latin America. It is better to have two, three, four major economic powers, so that the world economy does not depend solely on one powerful country and one currency.

We even talked about Canadian nuclear energy technology and the possibility of our acquiring Canadian reactors in the future, although at this point, this is neither the best nor the most economical option for the rapid growth in electrical power generation that we need with certain urgency.

I also spoke to him about all of the Mexicans dying on the U.S. border, where many more people now die every year than the total number who died throughout the almost 30 years of existence of the Berlin Wall.

There were very few major issues not covered in our talks.

Then, in view of the propitious atmosphere, and mindful of Canada's involvement in the political events in Haiti, currently in a process of normalization, and Canada's presence in that country, I pointed out that Haiti was a close neighbor and one of the poorest countries in the world, with terrible health indicators, including the prevalence of AIDS, which threatened to become a human catastrophe. I said that together we could set an example of cooperation by working out a joint health care program for Haiti where Cuba would send the medical personnel, and Canada would provide the necessary medicines and equipment.

He asked me if I had discussed this with the Haitian president. I said that I could not offer him such a thing without coordinating it first with the Canadian government, but I was certain that they would accept.

He spoke of his special interest in French speaking countries, given the fact that an important part of the Canadian population is francophone, and he was therefore interested in projects for Haiti. He said he would study the proposal, and I said I would talk to the Haitian government.

It would appear that this idea immediately brought another to his mind. He proceeded to tell me that he had a proposal to make concerning another joint project: a joint project with Angola and Mozambique to remove anti-personal landmines. You can contribute the workers, we will contribute the money, he said. The other countries had already signed the agreement, he added. We indicated that the only people who could do this work were

members of the armed forces. He responded that we Cubans had expert personnel and that they, the Canadians, would supply the money for the project, since the budget for it had already been approved.

Numerous countries had committed funds for clearing landmines, he explained, including Japan, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and others, and since we had the experts, he thought that the Cubans could do the job.

He undoubtedly did not realize how offensive his proposal could be: a humanitarian cooperation project in which Canada and other rich countries provide the money, while we take on the risk of mutilation and death of our soldiers. Perhaps he never viewed it this way, or was not well aware of what he was proposing, but I had the strong impression that he wanted to hire us as mercenaries.

For a moment I felt overwhelmed by a sense of outrage, recalling the selfless spirit of sacrifice, the clean and noble history of a people who had confronted a brutal economic war and special period ready to die for their ideas. Could anyone pretend to take advantage of this situation to try tempting us with such a mission?

In view of my interlocutor's character, and the friendly, candid, trusting and even good-humored atmosphere in which -I remember- our talks took place, I still believe that what he said and the way he said it were not a conscious act of what could be objectively interpreted from his words.

I explained that in Angola it was still difficult to clear mines because the armed bandits supplied by the United States and South Africa were still around; all of these landmines had been provided to Savimbi by the United States and apartheid-ruled South Africa. Moreover, given the risk of mutilation and death, how could we explain to our people Cuban participation in such a program?

With great composure, I proposed what I considered a reasonable solution: we were willing to train all of the necessary personnel from Angola, Mozambique and any other country affected by such problems to carry out this task in their own territories.

This subject took up almost all of the last part of our second exchange, although the conversation continued for several minutes more in the same friendly and cordial atmosphere. We had addressed the unfortunate issue calmly and reasonably, and our viewpoints were listened to and seemingly understood and accepted by the Canadian delegation.

The bases for two major cooperation projects with third countries had been agreed upon in principle, and work would continue on these bases.

I carefully observed the Canadian prime minister's character and personality. He is a pleasant conversationalist and has a good sense of humor, and one can strike up an interesting exchange with him on various subjects. He is concerned about certain problems in the world today, and shows great enthusiasm for his favorite projects. He is acquainted with many political figures, knows how to make use of his experience, and enjoys telling stories that are generally timely and interesting. He appeared to be sincerely patriotic. He is loyal to his country and proud of it. He is a fanatical believer in the capitalist mode of production, as if it were a monotheistic religion, and in the naive idea that it is the only

solution for all of the world's countries, on every continent, in every era, in every clime or region. He was educated in this belief, and I am not sure if someone with this belief can fully comprehend the realities of today's world.

I knew Pierre Trudeau, an exceptional statesman, an extremely modest and humble individual, a profound thinker, and a man of peace. I am certain that he understood the world very well, and that he understood Cuba, too.

Later, there were other activities. I attended a reception hosted by Chrétien in the patio of the Canadian embassy. He was cheerful, talkative, in a good mood. He would be meeting with Clinton soon. I accompanied him to the airport. As we were approaching the airport, I told him to give Clinton my regards, and to tell him that we harbored no feelings of hostility towards him. I calibrated my words carefully. More than anything, it was a courtesy to a visitor, but I paid dearly for it.

Some time later, I received a hand-written letter from Chrétien informing me that he had passed on to Clinton my wishes for better relations with him. That was not exactly what I had said. That is not my style; it does not coincide with the stance I have adopted throughout my life. It could be construed as a ridiculous plea to the powerful President of the United States. I began writing my own letter to Chrétien, explaining that this was not my message. It was an awkward situation. It was not easy to reconcile my annoyance with the precise terms needed to write this letter, and in a certain way my clarification became, at the same time, a kind of criticism of our friend. I almost managed it, but I finally gave up the idea, and even put away the draft of the letter, which might still be found in some old notebook; I had forgotten all about the matter until today. I could not even reciprocate his kind gesture of writing in his own hand. Perhaps he thought I was being rude.

Months went by, and there was no news about the Haitian project. For our part, we were merely waiting for a brief response. Along came Hurricane Georges. It devastated the Dominican Republic and struck neighboring Haiti, protected only by the 3000-meter-high Dominican mountain range near the border, which acted as a windbreaker. It then moved on to Cuba.

When the last gales of Hurricane Georges were still blowing, in the north of Western Cuba, on the rainy night of September 28, during a speech I gave at the closing ceremony of the 5th Congress of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, I said:

"I am asking the international community: Do you want to help this country which, not so long ago, experienced a military invasion and intervention? Do you want to save lives? Do you want to give proof of a humanitarian spirit? We are talking now of a humanitarian spirit and we are talking about the rights of human beings.

"... we know how 15,000 lives can be saved every year, how approximately 25,000 lives in Haiti can be saved every year. It is known that the annual infant mortality rate is 135 per 1000 live births. I repeat: 135 children below five years of age for every 1000 live births.

[...]

"Based on the premise that the government and people of Haiti

would welcome an important and vital aid package in that field, we are proposing that if a country like Canada, which has close links with Haiti –or a country like France which has close historical and cultural relations with Haiti, or the European Union countries which are integrating and now have the Euro, or Japan– would provide the medications, we are prepared to provide the doctors for that program; all the doctors needed, even if we have to send an entire graduating class or the equivalent.

[...]

“Haiti does not need soldiers, it does not need invasions of soldiers; what Haiti needs are invasions of doctors to start with. Haiti needs, moreover, invasions of millions of dollars for its development.”

November 1998: seven months had passed, and there was still no word from Chrétien about the projects we had discussed. Canadian Health Minister Alan Rock visited Cuba. I met with him. He had just met in Canada with Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the South African health minister. He arrived here truly impressed by what she had told him about the work of Cuban doctors in South African villages.

I explained to him in detail the joint cooperation project we were proposing. He appeared to be a sensitive and capable man, who understood the potential and importance of such projects. I asked him to expedite the steps required for the joint cooperation project with Haiti, as we were still waiting for Canada’s response to the proposal that had been made not only personally to its Prime Minister, but also publicly. He promised to submit a project to the Premier and the cabinet.

On December 4, Cuba sent the first emergency brigade to help the victims of Hurricane Georges, on its own. Medical groups continued to arrive in the following weeks, until they totaled 12, comprising 388 Cuban collaborators. Meanwhile, our Canadian friends did not show any sign of life. The medical project that we had proposed to carry out jointly with Canada was already underway, thanks to the efforts of Cuba, the Haitian government, and the support of non-governmental organizations.

In late February, the Cuban minister of foreign affairs reported that he had learned through unofficial sources that the Canadian government would donate 300,000 dollars to the medical project in Haiti. Naturally, we were very happy with this news.

Over 10 months had gone by without an official response from Canada, then, on March 4, we received a genuinely surprising response. The Canadian minister of foreign affairs, Mr. Lloyd Axworthy, sent a letter to the Cuban foreign minister, Roberto Robaina, in which he stated, among other things:

“... I have been informed of legislation recently introduced in the Cuban National Assembly on February 16, 1999, entitled “Law for the Protection of Cuba’s National Independence and Economy,” intended to target increased criminality and subversive acts.”

[...]

“I have asked my officials to prepare an assessment of recent Cuban measures, including the forthcoming sentencing of the

members of the Internal Dissidence Working Group, in order to determine how this will impact on the broad series of activities that we have undertaken under the bilateral Joint Declaration. Until this assessment is complete, I am asking my officials to refrain from undertaking new joint initiatives. I will be writing to my Cabinet colleagues to appraise them of this situation in order that they reflect on their own programs of bilateral cooperation with Cuba. As of now, I have put on hold the joint assessment by my department, CIDA and Health Canada, of the Cuban request to undertake third country medical cooperation in Haiti.”

[...]

“The days ahead will be important in reviewing whether Cuba will choose the policy of engagement and integration into the global community or continue in the uncertain direction of recent days. I hope that you will be able to provide a signal that can help clarify Cuba’s intentions, in particular, such a signal would be helpful in ensuring that recent developments do not become an undue preoccupation at the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.”

Was it a coincidence? A pretext to justify the heavy pressures from its neighbors to the south? Total insensitivity to the tragedy in Haiti? I do not want to pass judgment. But, how do you explain that ten months had gone by, and that during all that time, when the events that allegedly provoked such a drastic decision and insolent letter had not yet occurred, there had been no official response whatsoever?

Although I do not want to offend anyone, not even the distinguished author of this letter, it is impossible to ignore the arrogant, overbearing, interfering and vindictive tone in which this letter was written.

What bothered me most, personally, were not the punitive measures and threats against Cuba -after 42 years we are used to such treatment- but rather the fact that the 300,000 dollars would never reach the sick people in Haiti -and I do not even know if they were U.S. dollars or Canadian dollar, worth 64 cents of a U.S. dollar according to the exchange rate yesterday, April 24, 2001, since I have not had time to find out what it was worth on March 15 of that year. To me it was inconceivable that they would punish us at the cost of the lives of perhaps thousands of Haitian children, lives that could have been saved because at that point there were at least 25,000 children dying in Haiti every year, and the majority of those deaths could have been prevented with simple vaccines that could have been bought with those dollars, whether U.S. or Canadian. Undoubtedly, someone had made a big mistake.

I had believed the unofficial information passed on to me from the Foreign Ministry, because it seemed so plainly logical. At that point in time, I could not even determine if it was true or not.

There is no longer any need for regrets. Today there are 469 Cuban doctors and health care workers providing their services in Haiti. During the last two years and five months, until April of this year, a total of 861 Cuban collaborators have been through Haiti, and their services have not cost the Haitian people a penny. They provide health care to 5,072,000 of the country’s 7,803,230 inhabitants, or 62% of the Haitian population. They have saved the lives of many thousands of people, and relieved the pain or restored the health of hundreds of thousands more.

This year marked the beginning of the first stage of a massive vaccination campaign against eight preventable diseases. All of the vaccines have been supplied by Japan, with the participation of UNICEF, and Cuba will be responsible for implementing the program with the Cuban health care personnel already working in the country, who will reach 600 in number this year. We also know that in the future, through the combined efforts of France, Japan, Cuba and Haiti, a new vaccination campaign will be undertaken, and that as a result, in five years, this extremely poor Third World country will have attained a 95% immunization coverage.

With the victory achieved by Brazil and South Africa against the excessive costs of AIDS drugs, I believe that the day is not far off when the Haitians can also be protected against this terrible scourge, with the support of governments willing to contribute financial resources, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

Haiti is not the only country where the Cuban people are cooperating in health care projects based on the same principle. There are now 15 of them. These projects are being carried out with the cooperation of 61 NGOs and the participation of over 2272 Cuban health care workers, of whom 1775 are doctors.

Today, nobody can sabotage Cuba's cooperation with other countries in the Third World. Actions, not words, rapid responses, not waiting until kingdom come while there are human beings in poor countries dying every day and every hour. Our small country also provides special support for the training of doctors with a spirit of sacrifice, solidarity and selflessness. Progress is possible; overcoming calamities and alleviating the human tragedy afflicting hundreds of millions of people are not unattainable goals.

Today, I am thankful for the talks I had with Chrétien. They have served to prove that such initiatives are possible, as is joint cooperation with the participation of two, three or many countries. They also demonstrate that the hours that both he and I invested in these talks were not useless, and I followed his advice, working even harder for human rights, for saving lives, and trying to deactivate the gigantic anti-personal landmines that are placing our world on the brink of devastating explosions.

These small examples of what any small country can do carry more weight than any major agreements that the powerful make null and void, or any acts of demagoguery and publicity-seeking for the sake of personal vanity and ambition.

I am sure that Trudeau would never have said that he spent four hours giving advice to someone who had not asked for it; nor would he seek excuses for excluding an honorable country from a meeting that it did not ask to attend, or ask it to sign an agreement that it would never have signed.

History will say who is right.

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