

# Fidel Castro Is a True Internationalist

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, August 14, 2016

[teleSUR](#) 13 August 2016

*teleSUR looks at a few of the anti-colonial and revolutionary movements Castro has inspired and supported throughout his life, and his ongoing legacy throughout the world.*

## 1. Liberation of Southern Africa

✘ While Angola won its independence from Portugal on Jan. 15, 1975, inner political conflicts escalated between the leftist People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA, the National Liberation Front of Angola, FNLA, and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, UNITA.

According to declassified documents, the U.S. sought to gain hegemony through a CIA operation which resulted in US\$30 million in funding and support for the FNLA and UNITA. Apartheid South Africa supported the CIA operation by carrying out invasions, incursions and sabotages against Marxist forces within Angola.



Cuban soldiers, veterans of Cuito Cuanavale | Photo: The Greanville Post

Under Fidel's leadership, more than 25,000 troops and military advisers were deployed to

Angola during the war and ultimately helped win the independence of the country.

In 1988, the MPLA, with Cuban support, finally defeated the South Africans at the village Cuito Cuanavale after a six month battle. This battle was so vital to South Africa that the apartheid government considered using nuclear weapons against the MPLA and their Cuban allies.

By defending the MPLA's control over large parts of Angola and supporting neighboring Namibia's independence, Cuba curbed the ambitions of white supremacist South Africa. And after the fighting, Cuba continued to assist Angola with teaching programs like "Yes, I can," which has taught more than a million Angolans how to read and write, as well as provided medical and exchange programs.

## 2. Apartheid South Africa

While he was still alive, Nelson Mandela cited Cuban support for the war against C.I.A.-backed South Africa in Angola as a great anti-apartheid victory. According to the iconic South African leader, Castro's Cuba helped destroy the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor and inspired the Black population of his own country.



Nelson Mandela with Fidel Castro in Matanzas, Cuba in 1991 | Photo: AFP

"We admire the sacrifices of the Cuban people in maintaining their independence and sovereignty in the face of a vicious, imperialist-orchestrated campaign," Mandela said when he visited Cuba in the early 1990s. "We, too, want to control our own destiny."

It was for this reason that Cuba was the first country outside of the African continent that Mandela visited after his release from prison.

"Cubans came to our region as doctors, teachers, soldiers, agricultural experts, but never as colonizers. They have shared the same trenches with us in the struggle against colonialism, underdevelopment, and apartheid," said the legendary South African leader.

When Mandela visited the U.S. in June of 1990, he was criticized for his support for Fidel by right-wing protesters from the Cuban-American community. He was told that if he supported communism he should go back to Africa. Mandela's African National Congress party would never become communist, but his affection toward Fidel and the Cuban Revolution, "a source of inspiration to all freedom-loving people," was unwavering.

Hundreds of Cubans have given their lives, literally, in a struggle that was, first and foremost, not theirs but ours. As Southern Africans we salute them. We vow never to forget this unparalleled example of selfless internationalism.

### 3. Salvador Allende's Chile

During the 1970s, the left-wing Salvador Allende took power in Chile and began to transform the economic and social foundations of the country, nationalizing natural resources, building homes for the poor and improving access to health and education.



Fidel Castro visits Salvador Allende in Chile. | Photo: AFP

In 1971, Chile under Allende defied the United States and an Organization of American States protocol which prohibited states in the western hemisphere from having diplomatic relations with Cuba.

This resulted in Fidel taking a month long journey to Chile where he developed ties with Allende while also meeting workers, students, peasants and attending left-wing rallies.

Later in 1973, Fidel told Allende to beware of fascism in Chile, warning him against placing too much trust in the military.

Castro had advised Allende to arm the workers. "If every worker and every peasant had had a rifle like that in their hands, there would never have been a fascist coup," he remembered

later. “That is the great lesson to be learned for revolutionaries from events in Chile.”

It was around this time that Fidel famously gave Allende an AK-47, which he would reportedly use to defend the La Moneda presidential palace during the last moments of his life.

Fidel and Allende kept close correspondence up until 1973, when the latter was deposed in the infamous C.I.A.-backed coup led by Augusto Pinochet. The two wrote letters to each other on how to improve the political process in their respective countries. Fidel is known to have advised members of the Popular Union, Allende’s political party.

After the Sept. 11 coup that toppled Allende, Fidel delivered a speech in which he praised the left-wing leader for having “more dignity, more honor, more courage and more heroism than all the fascist military together.”

#### 4. Sandinistas Against Imperialism

The success of the Cuban revolution in the 1960s sparked a surge in leftist social movements and guerrilla movements who fought against right-wing dictatorships and U.S. imperialism in Central America. Many of these groups were not only inspired by the Cuban example but received direct support from Fidel’s Cuba including groups in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama—and of course, Nicaragua.



Fidel Castro and Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega are received by Spanish President Felipe Gonzalez in 1984

| Photo: EFE

Formed in the 1960s, Nicaragua’s Sandinista National Liberation Front overthrew Anastasio Somoza’s U.S.-backed dictatorship in 1979, instituting campaigns of mass literacy and health care and drastically improving gender and economic equality in the country. But as with so many other examples in Latin America, by the early 1980s the C.I.A. had begun

funding right-wing death squads in the country, known as the Contras.

Fidel's Cuba had begun assisting the Sandinistas in the late 1960s, training guerilla leaders. In the post-revolution period, this support increased to the spheres of education and health care. With U.S. involvement and right-wing violence increasing, Cuba also provided arms and logistical support to the Sandinistas in the fight against imperialism.

## 5. Bolivarian Revolution

Late Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez helped bring Latin America into the 21st century. After becoming president in 1999, Chavez was key in the region's so-called "Pink Tide," delivering radical social policies that transformed millions of lives while opposing U.S. imperialism across the continent.



Fidel Castro and Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez | Photo: EFE

The Bolivarian Revolution led by Chavez spread rapidly throughout Latin America, inspiring the world's first Indigenous president in Evo Morales and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, among other progressive leaders. And crucially, Chavez once described Fidel as his "mentor."

Today, Cuba and Venezuela have bilateral relations in virtually all industries and sectors, from energy management to cooperation in social programs in health, education and agriculture. One such program that perfectly illustrates the ideals of the Cuban—and now Bolivarian—revolution is Operation Milagro. Launched in 2004 by the governments of both countries, Operation Milagro has provided free medical treatment for people with vision impairment in both countries as well as 34 others across the Global South.

"This is such a powerful mission, which has become so widespread across the continent and beyond, including in Africa, that the goal set by Fidel and Chavez of 6 million patients is a goal that we are close to meeting," said Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro back in 2015.

In 2008, Maduro, then serving as foreign minister, echoed Chavez's sentiments when he

described the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as influencing “the path” for “real political, economic, social and cultural independence” in both the 20th and 21st centuries.

Maduro made the comments as he led a delegation in Cuba as part of the Cuba-Venezuela Political Consultation Body. “Our relation is a profound, longstanding, strategic fraternity by which we have become a single people, a single nation, as dreamed by the liberating fathers.”

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