

[Speech given by the president of the Republic of Cuba, Fidel Castro Ruz, on the occasion of the sixth grade graduation ceremony of Primary Schools in Cárdenas, Matanzas, on 21 July 2005 \[1\]](#)

Date:

21/07/2005

Dear graduates and families;

Dear people of Cárdenas;

Dear compatriots;

It goes without saying that this is a very special occasion. I have been watching Elián and I have to say that I feel as moved as he to be at this forum.

I mustn't go on for too long, it's quite hot and we have been lucky that the rain has respected our ceremony.

I hope there isn't a power cut (laughter), but I assure you that if there is it won't last long, just as long as necessary, and you can take my word for that, well, except if the world comes to an end, that's another matter entirely, and I hope that it doesn't happen.

I'm sure that many ideas and memories occupy our minds; the hurricane, this one, the other one, the one last year, the one that came after that, the one that came this year, the one that passed close by, and those to come. None is any match for us. A much worse and more powerful hurricane, that is also armed with nuclear weapons, yes, because the blow that was dealt us when it hit the country, over in the province of Granma and part of the province of Santiago de Cuba, was very nearly, as seen from the air, the closest thing to a nuclear explosion, without the radiation, but powerful enough to destroy everything. It is impossible to forget the image of Pilón, of Cabo Cruz and Niquero. Lots of nuclear weapons, one every 10 kilometres, we saw the after-effects over in Hiroshima and it was terrible, but it covered an area, a diameter, of 10 or 15 kilometres, it destroyed everything; but a hurricane of this speed devastates anything in its way, for hundreds of kilometres.

We feared for Cárdenas, given the way it was heading, the huge range in which the gale-force winds, as they say, were sometimes reaching up to 200 kilometres; luckily, it was losing power, due to a big mistake that it made, it wasn't like the one last year that entered directly from the Caymans, it came via the sea and passed directly through the province of La Habana and penetrated the capital; this one decided to enter via the very place, give or take, where the Girón mercenaries entered, and it met with pretty much the same fate.

It entered in that direction, and it was something that we knew very little about, and it was coming directly towards La Habana, on its right-hand side was Matanzas, Cárdenas and Varadero. It wasn't long since the other one had passed through, Michelle had passed by on its way to the south east.

In five years that citrus plantation has been hit by three hurricanes, and this one was headed the same way; but it covered around 300 kilometres, it was losing strength; it gave its all, with even gusts of 300 kilometres per hour, but the wind was losing momentum and its range was diminishing and, although the wind was still strong when it entered the province of La Habana, almost 200 kilometres, it destroyed a much smaller area. When it entered it was a category four and by the end it ranked as a category one; however, it has been one of the hurricanes that has caused the most material damage.

The other one was coming from more or less the same direction, and we were monitoring it, and while we were taking urgent measures to help those affected, we were now preparing ourselves for the second hurricane as well, and we're ready. I can assure you that we can withstand them, one, two, three, and we will perfect our mechanisms, so that, as on many other occasions, there is not one single victim. It can destroy anything it wishes, but in the eyes of the Revolution a human life is worth more than anything that a hurricane could ever destroy.

I hope that no-one doubts what I am saying.

Afterwards the rains came, arriving after one of the most severe droughts, or maybe even the worst to have ever affected our country; for many months hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people had to get their water from trucks, tankers, tractors, at a time when the price of diesel is over 500 dollars per ton, and petrol costs 600 dollars per ton.

Those who don't really stop to think about things should bear in mind that oil is not water, diesel is not water, petrol is not water, it doesn't fall from the sky, it isn't overflowing and the shortage of it is overwhelming. It is necessary to invest large sums of money into each of these substances: They don't fall from the sky, you have to earn them by the sweat of your brow or with energy and intelligence.

We still have a lot to learn, and we are going to learn, you can take my word for that as well.

Today even nature pays homage to this event; it pays homage to Cárdenas, it pays homage to this history from which so many things have developed, from which the Revolution regained strength; strength to wage a battle, to win it, confronted with the haughty and immensely powerful, as powerful as it is cynical, as powerful as it is cowardly, as powerful as it is miserable, the empire, that was unable to sweep away this Revolution despite its winds of perhaps 1 000 kilometres, or 10 000 per hour; it was unable to quash the will and resistance of this heroic people. Really, heroic, and you prove this; nobody lost heart, nobody gave in to fear. Whenever necessary this school has risen up in arms and has marched, in front of the Interests Section, and that's how these marches, attended by hundreds of thousand of children, mothers, youngsters, people, who fought non stop for month after month, happened.

I can assure you that we won that battle as well, I can assure you of this, because the fighting spirit wouldn't desist, our stance wouldn't desist, our peaceful but efficient weapons wouldn't desist, our truths wouldn't desist, our messages to the world wouldn't desist, and they didn't desist. This is where the slogan, Battle of Ideas, came from, because it was a veritable battle of ideas.

Let us remember that one of the things that increases the triumph of those events for us and for this history of our homeland is the fact that that is when the battle of ideas began, which will go on for a long time and will continue to reap rewards, it will continue to defeat the enemies.

It is clear that despite all the difficulties and all the setbacks, the truth will out, the most just ideas multiply and millions, tens of millions, hundreds of millions are uniting on the side of truth, and this truth, or these truths will end up crushing the empire, and not only from outside but also from inside; because we can never forget that at the end of that battle of ideas around 80% of Americans supported our cause, they supported our struggle, and they made the outcome possible. But, as was said at the time, that was the first step, and there are still many battles to be waged, that are being waged.

Thank you, then, to Mother Nature, who has cooperated in this event, there is a freshness in the air and I can see that there are lights on, as if announcing the many lights that never go off.

I was saying that, fortunately, Cárdenas has been left undamaged; Varadero has hardly been damaged; the province's capital has hardly been damaged, regardless of the near-on 180 000 homes affected by the hurricane, tens of thousands of which were completely destroyed; in spite of the many thousands of warehouses and facilities of all kinds that were affected.

I can also assure you of something else: there has never been an reconstruction effort such as the one that we are embarking on now. If you like, I'll give you some facts and figures:

I have been told that after the passing of Michelle, around 80 000 zinc roofs were delivered – they were delivered for the reparation programme -, whereas two days ago 250 000 roofs were delivered. And this is only a warm-up for the forces and resources that will be going into action.

I have mentioned some of these things because they cause us unrest. I recall that on that morning I was talking to the Party Secretary in the province: 'Where are you?' He replied: 'I'm in Cárdenas'. I asked him: 'How's Elián?' He is the symbol of Cárdenas. He said: Well, I've not been able to see Elián, but I've been told that he has had a fall'. 'What, Elián has had a fall?!' – on the 8th, in the morning. I saw him, he was laughing.

He said: 'He's had about three or four stitches'.

I said: 'How did he fall, what happened?' The hurricane still hadn't arrived, it had just entered Cienfuegos, and they said: 'No, the thing is' – I don't want to accuse him – 'the other one, the one with the brilliant smile, the one that conquered half of New York that afternoon' – he said – 'he pushed him. Yes, he fell over and he's had about three stitches'. I said: You don't say! We're not going to announce now that Elián has had stitches'. It was okay, because there's nothing to see, no mark, it's proof of the quality of our doctors, isn't it?, the fact that there's not a scratch on him. I said: 'Where was he injured?' There's nothing to see. But he had been pushed, you know when, the morning of the 8th. And, anyway, I asked several times later on, and he was okay. I was thinking that the hurricane was coming here or close-by.

Well, we now know what causes the most damage. The damage caused, as we explained..., there was talk of costs of 1 400 million, the damage is greater; but we know how to repair damage. Money is needed, raw materials are needed, lots of materials are needed; we will have to invest several hundred million, but not 1 400. If we have the raw material, we can put in the rest with hard work, with the people.

So, when it is said: so much was lost, okay, nobody is going to get back the crops that were lost at the Jagüey citrus plantation or many other things; but with the raw material that we are going to have at our disposal, we will produce what was lost to the hurricane, and much more besides; what was lost to this one, and if another one comes along we'll add it on, and if another one comes along, three hurricanes, we'll add them on.

Another thing I can assure you of is that with our effort and with the resources that the country can get together, we will repair all the damage and more besides. We'll see, within a year, on this same date, what is going on in the country, with or without a hurricane.

This shows that, like ants, we can do things, and like ants we have been doing things in many places; but also here in Cárdenas, we almost loose count: the Marcelo Salado school is new, it bears no resemblance to the one that we visited at the beginning; there is a splendid, beautiful new museum, I believe it is called the Museum of the Battle of Ideas. You see, this here, historic, with so many values; you see, there is the house that we have just visited, where José Antonio was born, it has been reconstructed and it too has been converted into a museum; there is the repair work underway in the

schools, there are the basic secondary schools, the advances made in the health sector over these last five years are notable, and it's no small thing, there's more, you'll see, in important plans for this city and others. There's lots to be done.

Varadero, one of the greatest tourist resorts in the world keeps on growing.

The general teachers who have emerged over the last few years, the emergent teachers, there's now around 15 000 of them, and many are here in Cárdenas.... From Matanzas they went to Havana to study. I remember that when we visited them, when they came back, the first lot went to the Marcelo Salado school. Now the emergent teachers are an institution and soon they'll have university degrees.

That's what the social workers are doing, there are 28 000 of them now, and those days were just the beginning. What a huge force! I was asking the young girls and boys who have just graduated from the sixth grade what they were going to study and many of them said to me: 'I'm going to the UCI (the University of Information Science) What a brilliant institute that doesn't stop moving forward! The girls and boys are selected from the highest achievers from around the country and it makes me so happy to think that many of those who I said hello to and to whom I gave the diplomas are going to go to that prestigious institute, a fair amount of them.

Others said to me: 'I want to be a doctor'. I said: 'Well be prepared, because we are going to send you on international missions'.

One told me that he wanted to be a painter, and another said that he wanted to be an astronomer.

Another child said: 'I want to be a teacher'. A little girl said: 'I want to be an actress'. They came one by one from over there and not one of them was in any doubt.

Some said: 'Well, I still don't know'. 'Ah, you don't know?, well you have to think about it. Okay, think hard about it, so that you don't get it wrong'.

There I saw the mark of our people, I saw the mark of our graduates of today, of the 1 246. What did that procession mean? What did each reply mean?

I asked myself: 'Is there any other place in the world where a graduation group of 1 246 pupils, like this one, pass by and each one of them knows or has some idea what they want to be? Not one of them was in any doubt.

Let's think for a second, let's go back in a time machine 50 years, let's find ourselves in Cárdenas, let's ask ourselves how many pupils graduated from the sixth grade, here and in the fields; let's ask ourselves if it could be the full hundred per cent, and all of sixth grade age, without development problems, and all with excellent knowledge, convinced as we are that it will be greater, and that each one of them came with their parents, bursting with pride and satisfaction, because those who are here are not those who were the owners of Varadero, of hotels, of large estates; no, those who are here today are from humble families whose parents could not aspire to get a university degree. How many graduated from the sixth grade, and how many from the ninth grade, and how many from graduated from high school, and how many could attend the only university that was so far away?

Yes, I know one, Doctor Selman, his father was a tailor, and I believe that as a tailor he was able to earn a decent wage, he moved over there so that his son could study at the university.

I am one of those who was privileged enough to be able to study and I am only too aware of the reason why, because I was not the son of an agricultural worker or of a cane cutter or of a cattle hand or of anyone who did any kind of labour like that. This was the chance that befell me, I wasn't to blame by any means, and I am glad that I made the most of the situation, that I was lucky enough to be able to study, and therefore, go to university, when there was just the one.

Who knows how many professionals there are among the mothers and fathers of the children who graduate here today, teachers, health workers, technical workers, and each and every one of them knows that in this country their children can study whatever they wish: from specialist in the highest level of computing and information sciences to cosmonaut, astronomer able to scrutinise the mysteries of the universe, of that infinity of stars that we see at night that are hundreds of light years away, thousands of light years away, light that travels at a speed of 300 000 kilometres per second, here from this little corner of the Earth, from this world, from this little planet in crisis, whose species is being threatened by the voracity and barbarity, the ignorance and stupidity of those who wield great power, the irresponsibleness of those who plunder the world and today can't even save it from destruction.

Our concern for the future of these children who are graduating here, those who have still not reached first grade, Elian's little brothers and sisters, is and always will be very great. What does the future hold for them in this world in which the environment is being destroyed? What can we do to save them from the brutes, the imbeciles, the cretins? And some people will ask themselves why I use such strong words. But suffice it to say that the sun is setting over here and it rises here, if you look to the North you'll see the most incredible brutality and crimes against the world that have never before been committed in the history of Man.

There are some very important things that concern us when we raise our eyes and try to look to tomorrow. What will happen to these children? We may have a hand in the cruel fate that awaits them if this battle of ideas isn't won, this battle that is today being waged worldwide in the name of the survival of the species. Today we see what we dream of for them, what we wish for for our people, that every child is born, as I have said on other occasions, anointed; because we receive many students for all over who study medicine, who study something else, who have the chance to take their high school diploma even though they're from humble origins, not in the best school, because you all know that the best schools are for the rich people in the world, except in the country that has experienced a revolution like ours. They do have the chance to come and study and receive a degree in medicine, they feel that they have been sent a gift from heaven, that they have been given the most extraordinary news: The possibility to come and study this noble profession in Cuba.

So, there are, for example, 10 000 medical students from other countries here, and many thousands more will come. Our country will become a producer of medical specialists in the world, and we will do it because we can and because the world needs it, hundreds of millions of human beings in Latin America and Africa and in other countries as well.

They study, they spend 7 years here in order to graduate with a degree in medicine, they are excellent; some of them are now going back and what magnificent professionals they have become.

To compare their situation with that of the children of these countries, the few who do graduate from the sixth grade, because there is 15%, 20%, 30% illiteracy; only a handful of children make it to the sixth grade in many of these countries and in others the percentage is higher. In Venezuela itself, many children didn't used to reach sixth grade, but thanks to the extraordinary educational revolution that is taking place over there, children are now graduating en masse as they do here.

I remember those first years of our revolution, so many pupils were behind, so many unqualified teachers, worthy people doing what they could, because thanks to them we set out on the road that led us to what we have today; but there wasn't one of those children nor is there one among the 1 246 who are graduating, and the parents here know it, that they cannot speak with exactness, like the children who passed by here, one by one; I am going to study this, the other thing, the other thing, or I'm going to think about it, I still haven't decided. But I ask you: Is there one of you who could raise your hand, just one of the parents of the 1 246, who could say that their child does not have the right to decide to study what he or she wishes? From astronomy, I repeat, to a doctor's degree in medical sciences, in philosophical sciences, or future dancers who make stages tremble worldwide, like those here at this school, represented by theses primary pupils of art school, even, or those scattered around the

provinces of the country, teaching dance, music, painting, or any similar manifestation, today within the reach of these children, because they know that they can say: I want to be this, and they will be, with the exception of those careers which require this or that vocation, and everyone has their vocation, for one thing or another.

Is there, by any chance, one of you who could raise your hand, mothers and fathers? Because you know that, even you mothers and fathers that, due to some kind of accident, are the parents of a child with some type of disability, or whom have been limited by an act of nature, you know that there are places in schools for more than 50 000 children suffering from these problems. I also ask myself: is there any child who has been forgotten, abandoned? There may be, but nowadays it is very unlikely that our social workers won't find him or her.

Sometimes the ignorance in some far-off corner of the country is such that people don't know that there is a social security service or that it is possible to receive the care needed; but, in fact, there is a team that finds these people, weighs them, measures their frame to check that they are of the right weight and size for their age group: these are the social workers.

I have devoted some time to pointing this out, because it needs to be thought about, reflected upon. Those who have nothing to show in this world, except poverty and pain, exploitation, plundering, abuse and crime, try to use lies to confuse. And these people must be asked whether there is any other place on Earth where what is being affirmed here can be also be affirmed.

People don't realise the power of the truth. One of the greatest secrets, maybe the most important secret, of this Revolution is that it deals in the truth, and the truth is invincible.

Maybe I used this time well, since there was almost more than enough, in which to share some inspired thoughts with you, an unforgettable memory of all those children and the words that I exchanged with them. Anything else: What personality! Sixth grade, I saw them walk past, one by one, the girls were in the clear majority. The boys had their personalities, but the girls; what personality! This is a rare thing elsewhere, this is the fruit of a different world, of a different society, quite a lot of equals in among the inequalities.

You know that those who create inequalities here are, for the most part, the crafty and the greedy, who as soon as the chance arises, put their hand in people's pockets and take away their salary, even just to get them in a van and charge them 100 pesos to take them to Havana or wherever. We know about all of these things, don't anybody think that we don't. And we are happy in the knowledge that all of these things are being put to an end, and not with the use of violence, they are being stopped through the process of enhancing what we have achieved, through enhancing our society. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind, I assure you, and it won't be the job of a group of men, it will be the job of everyone; all of you and all of your children will lead this fight. Because some people say: this is wrong. Ah!, but they don't criticise those who do it.

I read people's opinions on all the good things and all the bad things; but I'm not going to go into that here, there is a lot I have to say on the matter, but I don't want to talk about it today, I just want to tell you that we have a lot to think about, a lot to reflect upon and we must fight together; the defects that are still with us, the bad habits that we still have can only be overcome if we all join forces. And our forces shall join together!; because truth, nobility, honesty, the greatest qualities that a human being is capable of, can work miracles, they can make possible what for millennia, in fact, seemed impossible.

It looks like it's might rain, I, really, have said all the most important things; but, well, if you'd like me to give you some facts and figures.... A bolt of lightning better not fall now and spoil our happiness! I'm not going to let it.

The situation in the country:

'Number of primary schools, 9 029'

'Total number of pupils, 845 922'

Number of teachers in these 9 029 schools, 90 867. 16 619 of whom are emergent.

'Almost 100% of these pupils are taught by teachers in charge of no more than 20 pupils per class, or by two teachers if the number of students exceeds 20.'

No-one else can equal this, as we can see, like in the secondary schools, now there is one for every 15.'

'This year, in total, 143 435 pioneers graduated from the sixth grade, almost the full amount.'

'In the urban sector an 86.5% enrolled in groups of upto 20, the figure in the rural sector was 95.4%'

'99.1% of enrolled pupils benefitted from the implementation of the double session.

'Pupil assistance is at 99.1%Who would have guessed it!'

'98% of secondary school teachers have become the class's only teacher, substituting the old model of employing two teachers.'

'The task of ensuring that 100% of pupils stay in school has been acheived'.

'The relationship between the pupils and their groups is at 18.8 at national level and 18 in Ciudad de La Habana.

English lessons taught by way of videos to third to sixth grade pupils and chess lessons to various grades continue and are received with enthusiasm by the children and teachers.

'Regarding I.T lessons, concepts, habits and skills are formed with the help of 41 educational software programmes, and there is one computer for every 45 pupils'. The number of computers per pupil will continue to rise, that is inevitable.

The educational channels transmitted 31 programmes per week aimed at dealing with the objectives and essence of the subjects comprising the primary education syllabus, and went on to increase to two the Spanish language and mathematics class from the fourth grade.

'The quality assessments indicate that there is a tendency towards increasing learning, using the results of the Fifth Operation (in May 2001 the transformations in primary schools began) and the Tenth Operation, which drew to a close in May 2004, were taken as a benchmark.'

There's no meteorologist around, is there? Is Rubiera about? To tell us if it's going to start raining or not, so that we can leave here in an orderly fashion.

There's more, there are shortcomings which are being fought against.

'Primary education in Cárdenas'. I have all the information here; I'm not going to read it out, it should be published.

Do you have a radio station? (The reply is affirmative) You still don't have a television station, do you? (The answer is negative) No.

Alfonsito, when will we have a local television station in Cárdenas? (Exclamations and applause) Let's see, Alfonsito, give me a month. When? (The First Secretary of the Party in the province tells him 23

August, that they have the premises) We're going to give you a chance.

Well, we have the equipment; but Alfonso has more experience. Is there a possibility that they'll have it on that date? Why don't we give them until September? When the children go back to school. You shall have your local television station (Exclamations and applause), artists from here, T.V announcers, programmes and news from the vicinity. It's no longer provincial, it's local.

'Number of televisions', constantly on the rise.

'Educators, 519'

'Supply teachers, 22'. We're talking about Cárdenas.

'Degree holders, 210.'

'Retention rate, 100%' fast facts.

Scientists carried out 282 pieces of work: 85 investigations, 35 campaigns to encourage certain practices, 107 means of process, 55 educational games.

'This work was carried out by 291 authors and 156 co-authors' Who would have thought it! Etcetera, etcetera, there are more things here..... Looking towards the sky.

What a shame, here I have the report of the little gentleman who honours us with his presence. This is what we said on 28 June 2000:

'Our selfless teachers and educators must perform the chef d'oeuvre of making sure that a model child, worthy of his history and his friendliness and his talent, is, while also being a normal citizen, a constant symbol, an example and a figure for all our nation's children, and a reason for the educators of Cuba to feel proud'. And here are the results.

'His academic performance is very good and he handles information on the diverse spheres of reality, it could be said that for his age 'he knows a bit of everything'. And I would say that about some things he knows a lot.

'He has an excellent cognitive attitude, in relation to his age; he shows a willingness to learn and he likes to feel challenged. He faces up to the unknown without avoiding the difficulties. He takes a reflexive attitude towards knowledge; he often establishes a connection between new knowledge and that already acquired, generally arriving at the right conclusions.

'He is an observant child, who is able to make comparisons and define things with a fair degree of precision. He is capable of evaluating his own learning activities and that of his classmates with a good level of exactness.

'He is attentive and hard-working, he sets himself goals and perseveres in order to fulfil them. He is aware of his difficulties and publicly acknowledges them.

'He is a disciplined and respectful child. He doesn't like to be scolded, and therefore tries to do things well'. But I am sure that also, because of the child's growing conscience, it's not just because he doesn't like to be scolded. I have never scolded him, and he has never scolded me, we get on very well (Laughter)

'He enjoys good personal relationships, he is sociable, gentlemanly, especially with the girls; he takes an interest in other people's problems; his classmates are drawn to him because of his humility and modesty. He has a sense of responsibility where his younger siblings are concerned, to whom he is

attentive without being overprotective.'

It'd be better to be a bit stricter so that they don't go around pushing him when a hurricane is about to hit (laughter)

'He takes into consideration the opinions of the group and has been known to heed them when he has considered it the right thing to do.

'His respect of the group has been reflected when he has given them reasons for not being able to take part in some activity with them as he has had to attend unavoidable events.

'He adapts appropriately to the tasks set him, and is therefore capable of concentrating during the television classes, copying information, paying attention and actively participating in recreational activities. He likes to fulfil tasks in the participative games, without getting frustrated if he loses.

'He is clean and meticulous towards aspects of personal hygiene and his school material.

'An important sign of his qualities is found in the fact that he was unanimously appointed as leader of the pioneer group when he reached the sixth grade. His sense of responsibility has been evident, above all, in the way that he assumes his responsibilities as group leader.

'Furthermore, the tasks and activities comprising this responsibility have contributed greatly to his development, and have especially helped him to communicate in unfamiliar groups, to work hard to represent his group in an appropriate fashion, to generate ideas to guide the prefects and to make decisions in accordance with his stage of development.

'He completes the sixth grade with excellent results and an outstanding progress, today his effort matches the results he has obtained, for which he was acknowledged by everyone as the Most Integral Pioneer among the graduates of his school, despite the fact that he was the first to nominate another pioneer from his class.

'He writes his own speeches'.

I have the privilege of being his friend!

Patria o Muerte!

Venceremos!

(OVATION)

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