

POLITICAL STATEMENT BY DR. FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, PRESIDENT OF THE STATE COUNCIL OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA [1]

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I was reluctant to expose the evidence of what developed in Monterrey, which obligated me to leave the same day I addressed the Summit, because Mr. Castañeda had dragged President Vicente Fox in his shameless adventure, and I could not disclose the evidence without implications for the Mexican Head of State.

Mr. Castañeda in Washington had hatched the recent conspiracy against Cuba in Geneva. The Checkian government was already weary of its costly and discrediting role of mercenary.

Last year, after the resolution forcibly imposed against Cuba in Geneva, the U.S. government was deprived of its membership in the Commission on Human Rights through a humiliating but well-deserved punishing vote cast in secret ballot at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was the most shameful defeat ever sustained by that country since the establishment of that institution in 1945.

Then, Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda volunteered to give a Latin American face to the new treacherous maneuver. A cynical, rigged and misleading proposal had to be promoted by Latin American delegations in the Commission on Human Rights. That is what he did for the rest of the year 2001, thus creating several incidents with Cuba, which were severely criticized by political figures and members of the Mexican House of Deputies and the Senate.

On April 20, 2001, one day after the resolution against Cuba was voted, in which Mexico abstained, our country's Minister of Foreign Affairs comrade Felipe Perez Roque stated that Mexican Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda had done everything possible to change Mexico's position and have Cuba condemned. All throughout that year, Mr. Castañeda schemed and conspired to that end.

At the beginning of this year, and following a Mexican initiative, arrangements were made for a high level delegation to visit Cuba headed by Fox. The pretext was to improve relations between our two countries. The Monterrey conference was afoot.

Just like Reagan had done in 1981, on the occasion of a North-South Summit of Heads of State or Government that would be held in Mexico on October that same year, Mr. Bush threatened not to attend if Cuba was there. Again, the honor and duties of the Mexican government came into conflict with its interests. It should be clear that I mean the government of Mexico; I am not referring to our brother, the Mexican people.

Mr. Fox's and Castañeda's trip to Cuba, where they arrived on February 3, at 10:30 am, was thoroughly designed. It was full of duplicity and calculation. We were perfectly aware that one of the purposes was to request that we did not participate in the conference. They did not dare. The first hour, practically the first minutes, of the meeting that began at 11:14 am, sufficed. I started by reminding them of the invitation extended to our country by the United Nations to take part in that Summit and went on to analyze in depth the perfidious and hypocritical maneuvers against Cuba in Geneva.

Subsequently, the exchange with Fox and other members of his entourage that morning grew serious

and fruitful on various subjects. Castañeda grew nervous and uneasy; you should not think that I have anything against him. After that first meeting, I shared a light lunch with Fox and his delegation. Later, he laid a wreath at Jose Marti's memorial and began an extensive tour in which I accompanied him. We talked seriously and intimately on various issues while we drove to places. We visited old Havana and a power plant in the east of the capital, which operates with oil-accompanying gas using a combined cycle technology. I then suggested that we go to the house of Dr. Eusebio Leal, Historian of the City, whom Fox had just decorated, to visit his convalescent mother.

Our tour ended at the International Neurological Restoration Center where numerous Mexicans are successfully treated.

On the other hand, at 4:00 pm that same afternoon, our Minister of Foreign Affairs had a meeting with Mr. Castañeda who did not dare raise with Felipe the issue of the projected resolution against Cuba in Geneva, neither he mentioned the Monterrey Summit. He did promise, however, that Mexico would not sponsor, promote or support any motion against Cuba in Geneva.

At 8:00 pm there was an official welcome ceremony at the Palace of the Revolution and at 8:53 Fox and I met privately in my office. When we came to the Geneva issue, after various explanations, he literally assured me that Mexico would never do anything against Cuba since there was a longstanding relationship between Mexico and Cuba that he did not want to harm in any way. Later, and according to the itinerary, we had a dinner that developed in a friendly atmosphere. The visit left us with a positive impression. We had many hours of respectful and seemingly sincere exchanges.

However, that nice impression would not last long. Castañeda took to making enigmatic and bizarre statements: "Mexico's relations with the Cuban Revolution have ceased to exist, and relations with the Republic of Cuba have begun..." "Mexico's position today is different from that of the past", etc. A short time later he traveled to Miami to dedicate, on February 26, a Mexican Cultural Institute. His guests were a curious fauna of terrorists and counterrevolutionaries of Cuban descent that have never had any interest in culture.

Again, he took to his theoretical lucubration on Mexico's relations with the Revolution or the Republic of Cuba, using sweet words to address his "selective" audience. He said: "The doors of the Mexican Embassy in Havana are open to every Cuban, the same way Mexico is." Then, the editors of the subversive and ill-named Radio Marti station manipulated his statements and spent the entire following day repeating that relations between Mexico and Cuba had been severed and the doors of that country's embassy in Havana were open to all.

A grave incident occurred late in the night, which was solved only thanks to the earnest and efficient cooperation of Cuba requested by the Mexican government. Again, malicious rumors and rude slanders were spread. It was even said that it was all a Cuban provocation. This is now the beginning of March. The Monterrey Summit is very close.

For obvious reasons, I usually do not announce my decision to attend, or not, such gatherings. And, if I decide to go, it is only at the last minute that I inform the concerned authorities. Some people arrive in these conferences without previous notice, and they have never had any difficulties with the hosts. This time, when the decision was made about three days before the meeting, I announced my arrival 24 hours in advance, on March 19. I had two reasons for that: Bush did not want me there neither did Fox. On the other hand, I did not wish to get involved in a lengthy discussion with Fox and Castañeda who would try to persuade me and beg me not to go.

When President Reagan threatened to boycott a meeting in 1981, I found myself in the need to oblige to President Jose Lopez Portillo. But, in his embarrassment, this man behave like a gentleman and had an elegant gesture; he invited me to Cozumel and very candidly explained his tragedy. I obliged.

Presently, the men and the times are different. The international situation is today extraordinarily grave

and complicated. The main issue to be discussed in that conference was of crucial importance to every country from the poor and exploited world. It was my right to attend and I decided to do just that. I knew that as soon as I informed my decision to participate, it would take less than a minute before the President of the United States learned about it, and the unavoidable pressures would come on Mexico. I did not want to give them much room for that. Therefore, I wrote a short letter and instructed our ambassador there to deliver it to the President of Mexico at 7:00 pm Cuba time, 6:00 pm Mexico time.

Although Monterrey was by then full of delegates, our delegation had earlier booked half of the 40 rooms in a small recently opened hotel. Due to the uncertainty about the trip they had not booked them all. On the other hand, we wanted to misinform the perennial and omnipresent terrorists, trained, spoiled and protected by the United States. Eventually, I would only need half the rooms in that small hotel.

The content of my letter, already published by Mr. Castañeda with the aim to manipulate a phrase he would use in his arguments to try explaining my swift return, literally reads:

Havana, March 19, 2002

His Excellency Mr. Vicente Fox Quesada

President of the Mexican United States

Dear President:

I have read again your kind letter from January 28 this year, in which you invite me to take part in the International Conference on Financing for Development, convened by the United Nations, and to be held in Monterrey. Before that, on December 21, 2001, I had received an invitation from ambassadors Shamshad Ahmad and Ruth Jacoby, co-chairpersons of the UN Preparatory Committee.

The enormous amount of work I have had in the last few weeks would not allow me to be certain of attending such a Conference. That made me feel bad about Mexico, the venue of that important meeting, and about the United Nations, which has showed great interest in the event.

Therefore, I have taken the decision to make a special effort to participate in that conference, even if for the minimum time possible. It is a pleasure for me to communicate this decision to you first.

I hope to be able to contribute with a constructive spirit to the success of that Conference for which Mexico has worked strenuously.

I wish you every success, dear President Fox, as I reiterate the testimony of my personal friendship and consideration.

Fidel Castro Ruz

When I said that it would be a short stay, I clearly meant that I would limit myself to the two days of the conference --that was really my intention-- and that I would not pursue any additional itinerary in Mexico.

At the time our ambassador delivered the letter to the President's personal secretary, he was told that Fox would be leaving for Monterrey shortly. After our representative had completed that mission, he went to the offices of the Home Minister whom he informed of the same in order to make the necessary arrangements. We would be arriving in Monterrey 24 hours later.

Around 11:00 pm that night, Cuba time, a telephone call from Mexico was received in my office. They said that President Fox wanted to talk to me as soon as possible. As I was not there, they were asked to retry a little later. At 11:28 they were calling back again. At that moment I was meeting with several comrades in a room not far from my office. I instinctively felt something was wrong.

It was strange, I thought, because the President goes to bed early! The tone reeked of an emergency. I had no further doubts. I left the room and headed for my office. I asked to be put through with President Fox. An unusual dialogue would follow whose transcription I offer, just as it was registered.

Fidel.- Yes, Mr. President. How are you?

Fox.- How are you, Fidel?

Fidel.- Well, very well, thank you. And, how are you?

Fox.- What a pleasure! Listen, Fidel, I'm calling you on this surprise I had a couple of hours ago, when I learned that you intend to visit with us in Mexico. First of all, I'd like to make this a private conversation between you and I. Do you agree?

Fidel.- Yes, I do. I hope you have received my letter, haven't you? I sent it...

Fox.- Yes, I did, a couple of hours ago, that's why I'm calling you now.

Fidel.- Oh! Good. I had been told that you go to bed early, so we sent the letter early.

Fox.- Yes, I go to bed early, but this has kept me awake.

Fidel.- Don't you say it!

Fox.- No, really, the fact is I got it... It's 10:00 pm here, I got it at 8:00 pm, and we were just here having dinner with Khofi Annan.

Fidel.- Oh!

Fox.- But, look Fidel, I'm talking to you first as a friend.

Fidel.- Yes, you are talking to me first as a friend. I hope you will not tell me not to go.

Fox.- (He laughs) Well, let's see. Let me explain it and let's see what you think.

Fidel.- I'm listening, but I'm telling you before you speak. Very well.

Fox.- What?

Fidel.- That I'm listening, but I'm telling you before you speak.

Fox.- OK, listen to me first. Listen first.

Fidel.- Yes.

Fox.- Yes, as a friend, the truth is that this surprise, at the last minute, creates many problems for me.

Fidel.- Why is that?

Fox.- Security problems, attention problems.

Fidel.- Well, never mind that, Mr. President. It seems that you don't know me.

Fox.- You are not concerned about that.

Fidel.- No, I assure you; and I'm not taking 800 men with me like Mr. Bush.

Fox.- But, friends do not simply let you know at the last minute that they are coming.

Fidel.- Yes, but I'm taking risks like no other, and you know that well.

Fox.- Well, but you can trust a friend and you could have told me before that you intended to come. That would have been better for both. But, look, I realize that it is your absolute right. However, perhaps, if it were possible for you to help me, as a friend.

Fidel.- Yes. Tell me what can I do for you, except that.

Fox.- Well, "what can you do for me, except that?"

Fidel.- Yes. How? What should I do? I'm willing to take any risks, I don't mind the risks. (The situation was growing more serious; neither the neighbor in the North, nor the host country really wished to have me there.)

Fox.- Let me see...

Fidel.- But you understand that it would cause a world scandal, I mean, if I'm now told not to go.

Fox.- But, what's the need to make a world scandal if I'm talking to you as a friend?

Fidel.- Listen, it's because you're the President of the country and if you're the host and you prevent me from going there, I'd have no choice but to publish my speech tomorrow.

Fox.- Yes, yes, you're right. It's your right, absolutely, to do so. But, let me make you an offer.

Fidel.- Yes.

Fox.- Yes?

Fidel.- I'm listening.

Fox.- I don't know when it is you intend to come because you have not said that, but my offer would be that you come on Thursday.

Fidel.- Let's see, tell me exactly, I'm willing to compromise on this. Let's see, what day is today? Tuesday. At what time do you want me there on Thursday?

Fox.- Because you...I mean, Cuba has its turn to speak at the Plenary on Thursday.

Fidel.- Yes, yes. The exact time there, there it is...it should be Thursday...

Fox.- About 1:00 pm.

Fidel.- No, on Thursday I should take part in a roundtable and I should present my speech in the morning.

Fox.- Because your speech would be in the morning, close to 1:00 pm.

Fidel.- More or less. I'll help you in everything, I won't give you any trouble, and I won't even attend dinners, not even the meeting... Well, we'd need to talk about that meeting...

Fox.- There you go, let me finish.

Fidel.- Yes.

Fox.- You could come on Thursday, take part in the session and present your speech, as Cuba's reserved turn would be around 1:00 pm. After that there would be a lunch offered by the state governor to the visiting Heads of State. I'm even offering you, inviting you, to attend that lunch, even to sit by me, and that after this event --you have already made your speech-- that you go back, thus...

Fidel.- Back to Cuba.

Fox.- Well, no, perhaps you could find...

Fidel.- Where to? A hotel? Tell me.

Fox.- Back to Cuba, or wherever you chose to go.

Fidel.- Right.

Fox.- That way I'd be free on Friday --and that's my request to you-- so that you create no complications to me on Friday.

Fidel.- So, you don't want for me to complicate matters for you on Friday. Very well, but apparently you did not read a line in my letter where I said that I'm coming in a constructive spirit to cooperate to the success of the conference.

Fox.- Yes, I did read that line.

Fidel.- If my words were not clear... I understand the other things that we won't discuss, and what could happen. I almost guessed that you'd be calling to say something like this. I tell you very candidly: I'm willing to cooperate with you. I'm willing to cooperate with you and do as you are asking.

Fox.- We can do it this way.

Fidel.- Yes, would you repeat it, please?

Fox.- Let's see. You'd be arriving Thursday morning, at any time you chose.

Fidel.- Yes, Thursday morning, and I make my speech.

Fox.- Yes, you make your speech to the plenary session; you take part in the Heads of States' lunch, where I'm inviting you even to sit by me.

Fidel.- Very well, thank you.

Fox.- And in the afternoon, you could leave at any time you chose.

Fidel.- Yes, very well. Let me look at the time, we have a one-hour difference, the time at which I'd have to be moving.

Fox.- We have a one-hour difference.

Fidel.- If I had to arrive a little earlier; let's see, because I know now where I cause the greater damage, (he laughs) but I could be there at dawn.

Fox.- On Thursday?

Fidel.- Because the time [to speak] is 1:00 pm, and our people there were negotiating my turn, then I could speak before that. Perhaps, but I'm prepared for that time approximately, since there are 30 speakers before me. This last minute decision has hurt me too, I admit it, because I really made it at the last minute. You were reproaching me about what a friend should or should not say. But I have two things: firstly, I have to think of the risks; secondly, I had not made my decision. That's the truth.

Fox.- Yes, yes, I understand, I understand.

Fidel.- But, at a given moment, I decided it was convenient, as I have explained to you in my letter. I'd beg you that, when you have a chance, you read it again.

Fox.- I have it here with me.

Fidel.- And the Secretary General, is he there near you, are you dinning with him?

Fox.- He left about 15 minutes ago. He went to his hotel and tomorrow he'll go to Monterrey.

Fidel.- What a pity that I cannot listen when he speaks! Because I think he will be speaking at the beginning.

Fox.- Let me see, Fidel, you, you...Yes, I know that...

Fidel.- Well, if you could make arrangements so that I could be the number 10 speaker, if you could get me that turn...

Fox.- Let's see, wait a second.

Fidel.- Yes.

Fox.- I'll be speaking on Thursday. The opening ceremony starts at 9:00 am.

Fidel.- At 9:00 am, very well.

Fox.- I assume that the Secretary General would be speaking and then I'd be speaking too.

Fidel.- Yes, I'd like to listen to his speech because it was him that invited me.

Fox.- There is no problem in your coming for that.

Fidel.- You are the President of the host country; it was not the United States, it was Mexico.

Fox.- There is no problem in your coming for that, arriving early and being there for the opening ceremony, from 9:00 am that we begin, when he will be speaking and I will be speaking, too. In fact, your turn will be about the 10th.

Fidel.- No, my turn is number 30, but if you can get me number 10, that is, following the main speakers --I think Chavez will be one of them as chairman of the G-77-- and some others; if you can get me a 10 or 12...

Fox.- But, do you want me to change your turn, that is, to have you before 1:00 pm?

Fidel.- Talk to Khofi, talk to Khofi and raise your problem with him, he'll understand, the world has masters and this is very serious.

Fox.- I can talk to Khofi Annan. (He laughs)

Fidel.- Talk to Khofi Annan. (he laughs) Do you understand?

Fox.- Yes, yes, I can talk to him, of course.

Fidel.- Then, I can do as it pleases you; I go there and I speak. Perhaps, it'd be better for me to get there by midnight or so, to get some sleep and go there.

Fox.- You simply let me know at what time you're coming. I even have a residence, a place for you to come if you arrive too early.

Fidel.- Well, there is that small hotel, and a few rooms have been booked,
because I had not decided to go.

Fox.- Yes, the problem is that there are no rooms, that's the problem, there are no rooms.

Fidel.- No, but our delegation has 20 rooms there and some of our people could go to other places, houses that rent rooms.

Fox.- Yes, we could handle it. You have friends there in Monterrey who would take you in at any time. That's not a problem. You must arrive in the early morning hours.

Fidel.- Look, I can do better. Must I arrive in the early morning hours?

Fox.- Yes. What is it that you call the early morning hours, 5:00 or 6:00 am?

Fidel.- No. Look, I'd rather get there about 10:00 pm the previous night, approximately.

Fox.- Oh! I see, you'd arrive Wednesday night.

Fidel.- Yes, I would do so quietly. We would meet there in the morning, people would see me there in the morning.

Fox.- Try to make it later, and let's see how we manage; I mean, later in the night or in the first hours of next morning.

Fidel.- All right.

Fox.- You may arrive, get your accommodations and take part from 9:00 am.

Fidel.- I accommodate myself and I get there at 8:30. Listen.

Fox.- Yes, exactly, exactly.

Fidel.- Then you can assure me that you talk to Khofi Annan and you explain the problems to him, otherwise I'd have to talk and explain to him because I've been invited by the United Nations.

Fox.- No, there is no problem with that. I...

Fidel.- You were really kind to send that invitation as a host, but it is the United Nations that invites me. I told you that here, it was the first thing I told you when we began our talks here, that I had that invitation.

Fox.- Yes, you're right. Then, let's go on thinking like that. Then we finish...

Fidel.- Right. Then, I do as you say to please you; I leave earlier. I really want to be back here soon. I have a lot of things to do and I'm very enthusiastic about them.

Fox.- Fidel, can I ask you another favor?

Fidel.- I'm listening.

Fox.- That while you are here, it would be very good for me if there were no statements on the Embassy issue, or the Mexico-Cuba relations, I mean, that experience we went through a few days ago.

Fidel.- There is no need for me to make statements there.

Fox.- That's good!

Fidel.- Tell me, what else can I do for you?

Fox.- Well, basically, not to attack the United States or President Bush, but

rather to limit ourselves to...

Fidel.- Listen, Mr. President, I'm a person who's been in politics for about 43 years, and I know what I should do and what I should not do. You don't need to have any doubts that I know how to tell the truth politely and with the proper elegance. You don't need to fear because I won't be dropping any bombs there. The truth is that I disagree with that Consensus that has been proposed over there. But, I'll limit myself to present my basic ideas and do so with all due respect. I will not use that forum to make a stir. I'll go there to speak the truth, or I could not go and say it from here tomorrow morning; for me that's not...

Fox.- That is precisely what you offer me in your letter: a constructive participation, to make a real contribution to the debates, to the solution of the problems we all have in the world.

Fidel.- Yes, Mr. President, you should also bear in mind that when I make one of such trips I do so at great risk.

Fox.- Yes, I understand that.

Fidel.- You should know. And I don't do it, I mean, be absent from there because I'd be ashamed after I have made the decision to go. I have not gone to other places; I did not go to the Summit in Peru, but I have a much higher concept of the importance of this conference and a much higher concept of Mexico. It seemed to me that I'd be really hurting you and the Mexicans if I did not go. I won't be going there to make a stir, or organize demonstrations, or anything like it. I bear in mind that you are the President of that country and that, regardless of my rights, I should take your wishes into account. I'm glad that you have thought of a decent formula, that I may be there on time and listen to the Secretary General of the United Nations. And, if you could enlist the assistance of the Secretary General to ensure that I speak earlier --that is, not be there for long, the longer I stay the...-- I mean, a turn to speak between number 10 and 15, after the list of speakers begins to roll, aside from your speech. We could speak to our comrades there, give them instructions --they have already been instructed to try to change to an

earlier turn-- then, I'd be free to avoid causing you any more trouble.

Fox.- Yes. Listen, Fidel. Anyway, there is still that invitation for you to accompany me to that lunch; that would be about 1:00 or 1:30 pm, then, after lunch you could leave.

Fidel.- Provided you do not offer me turkey with chili sauce and lots of food because I don't like to travel by plane on a full stomach...

Fox.- No, we have goat, which is very tasty.

Fidel.- You are offering goat?

Fox.- Yes, sir, excellent.

Fidel.- Good, very good.

Fox.- Then, can we say we agree on that?

Fidel.- Yes, we agree on that, and we are friends; friends and gentlemen.

Fox.- Yes, I really appreciate it and I only need to know at what time you are arriving to welcome you and take you to your accommodations.

Fidel.- I'll tell you the time. Well, if you like I can even get there earlier and that way we can save time. At what time are you going to bed tomorrow?

Fox.- Tomorrow?

Fidel.- Yes.

Fox.- What is it tomorrow? Wednesday? Tomorrow I'll go to bed early, as a good rancher.

Fidel.- As a good rancher. I'm quite the opposite, I usually stay up until very late. Tell me, what would be the best time for you?

Fox.- Look, as you are saying 10:00, 11:00, 12:00 midnight, for you to accommodate, get some rest, and be there in the morning.

Fidel.- Very well, I agree.

Fox.- Then, let the embassy give me the exact time to welcome you properly.

Fidel.- Yes, tomorrow you'll know the exact time.

Fox.- We'll talk about it with the Embassy.

Fidel.- Yes, as always, I deeply appreciate that deference, that honor, if you go there; I think that would help much to...

Fox.- You attend that lunch with me and from there you go back.

Fidel.- I take your orders, and from there I come back.

Fox.- Fidel, I really appreciate it.

Fidel.- Very well, President.

Fox.- This way everything will be all right.

Fidel.- I think so, and I thank you.

Fox.- Well, I agree, and have a good night.

Fidel.- ...for your deference and for finding an honorable and acceptable formula.

Fox.- Yes, I think it is, and I appreciate it.

Fidel.- Very well, then, I wish you a great success.

Fox.- Good night.

Fidel.- Good night.

The distinguished President of Mexico had said the last word. It was my unquestionable right to take part in that conference convened by the United Nations and not by Mr. Bush. But I could not travel to Monterrey against the expressed will of the President of the host country. I had to accept using the corresponding six minutes and then leave after lunch, or before, if I could speak earlier and not be number 30. That number had been obtained by drawing lots, among other reasons because I had not been able to confirm my presence before, in order to avoid the immediate mobilization of the abovementioned pack of terrorists and hit men, that from the U.S. territory are organized and paid to try to assassinate me every time I travel to an international gathering.

I should add that when I arrived in Monterrey, Mr. Fox did not show up in the airport as he had promised he would, even though I did not ask him at all. He did not even make a courtesy phone call. I did not mind in the least. I am not particularly fond of protocol and courtesies.

Nevertheless, I found a strange comfort in the fact that, although I had been ordered to leave immediately after lunch, on two occasions he told me that I would have the immense honor to sit by him for the worldly joy of tasting a delicious goat.

Yet, I could not leave the Summit without offering an explanation. I had never acted like that before in any of them. The distinguished President of the United States might have thought that Cuba was afraid to sit, with its head held high, in his powerful and august presence.

At the Rio de Janeiro Summit, in 1992, his own father had the gesture, as commendable as it was unusual, to deliberately enter the conference hall a few minutes before my speech. He calmly listened and even applauded, both he and his delegation, after I had finished. As the old saying goes: "Politeness doesn't need to be a sign of weakness". Nobody in our country, Mexico or elsewhere would have understood such a strange withdrawal. To explaining it, I limited myself to three lines:

"I beg you all to excuse me that I cannot accompany you any longer due to a special situation created by my participation in this Summit, and that I find myself obligated to immediately return to my country."

I could not have said less, nor could I have said it more cautiously. I completely forgot about the goat. I left the conference room and met for a few minutes with the President of Colombia to exchange on the peace efforts in that country. Then, I went on to say good-bye to the United Nations Secretary General who had, of course, been informed the day before of what was going on by our ambassador to that

organization.

Together with him, in an obvious show of solidarity, were Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and South African President Thabo Mbeki. I left taking the electric stairs. On the interior balconies and side halls there were numerous UN and Mexican employees as well as other countries' participants in the event who applauded in solidarity. A crowd of journalists was quickly moving along, taking pictures and asking for a statement. I did not say a word. I left the building.

I had not left behind any intractable complication. My last words, at the end of my presentation, were:

"Comrade Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada, Speaker of the National Assembly of People's Power, stays as head of the Cuba delegation. He is a restless combatant in defense of the rights of the Third World countries. I delegate to him my prerogatives in this meeting as a Head of State.

"I hope that he is not prevented from taking part in any official function to which he is entitled as head of the Cuban delegation and President of the Cuban state supreme body."

There was a very simple solution for the hosts. Accepting the presence of Ricardo Alarcon, head of the delegation for the official functions of the Summit, would have put an end to the incident. Only a minimum of vision and common sense on the part of the hosts was needed. I do not know if it was the arrogance and adventurous nature of President Fox's court advisor, or if it was Bush's prepotency, that impeded that honorable solution.

Despite the time, I had not had breakfast yet. I left for the small hotel where I was staying. I had invited my dear friend Hugo Chavez to have lunch with me there. His participation had also been hazardous, as the distinguished Mexican host had interrupted him during his address to the conference on behalf of the Group of 77 and his own country.

The fraternal and relaxed reunion went on for hours with exchanges on various issues. This was three weeks before the frustrated fascist putsch against the Bolivarian Revolution. It was not a succulent lunch but it was nice. We lunched on Mexican tortillas, fried beans and other traditional dishes of the sister nation, which I found more delicious than the goat.

I was completely oblivious of the time and the peremptory order to leave immediately after lunch. Meanwhile, Mr. Bush impatiently waited for hours in El Paso --currently located in the U.S. border with Mexico since the invasion of 1846, when half of the country's territory was snatched-- for the report that such an annoying participant had left Mexico. Nobody from protocol remembered it or perhaps they did not want to bother the disciplined and obedient, albeit absent-minded guest who finally left Monterrey at 5:00 pm. Apparently, Bush grew tired of waiting and received permission, or decided by himself, to be on his way lest he might be late for dinner.

Somebody parked his plane by the old IL-62 from Cubana Airline. While driving by, he had a friendly gesture when he waved to the Cuban crew that was waiting for me on the stairs. I was unaware of such events. I said good-bye to Chavez, took the car and, with my small motorcade, left for the airport. We passed under the avenue leading to it, that way we incorporated to the same road that Bush's enormous motorcade had left minutes before. After all, we were just a few meters away from each other in Monterrey. It was a beautiful and shining evening when our airliner took off.

Our delegation, headed by the Speaker of our National Assembly and accompanied by our Foreign Minister, stayed on in the venue city. It was only natural that there would be no other problems. Would Ricardo Alarcon be excluded from the Summit official functions? Would he be permitted, or not, to take part in the soiree the following day, after a speech in which the distinguished President of the United States --"very democratically" and without interruptions-- would use twice the time assigned to every other lesser mortal attending the conference as head of delegation?

Although such an exclusion seemed to us absurd, clumsy and unlikely, I entrusted our people there with the task of explaining the truth, if it all came to that, but avoiding any mention of the existence and the content of the conversation between Fox and I, whose privacy I wished to preserve at all costs, saving it for the archives of the Revolution.

It was a bad omen that Mr. Castañeda would hastily announce that same afternoon that protocol was protocol, and that it could not be altered. As usual, he was devising pretexts to honor his commitments with the United States and to hide the truth. Minutes before the meeting, Alarcon was informed that he would not have access to it. As previously decided, the head of our delegation explained in numerous press conferences the true reason of my absence. Among other things, he said:

"Yesterday, in some meetings with the press, Foreign Minister Castañeda said that no authorized official had made any arrangements that would limit Cuba's participation, and repeatedly suggested that it fell on Cuba to explain what had happened because he had no arguments to do so. I must say that his statements are absolutely false."

And he added:

"Not only were they authorized officials, but I would go as far as saying that very well authorized officials with the Mexican government had informed us, before the conference, of the pressures put on them by the U.S. government to prevent Cuba's participation in the conference, and particularly, for our delegation not to be headed by the President of the State Council, that is, comrade Fidel Castro.

"Castañeda knows that we know it and that it was very easy to explain it; also that if we had not done it until now, it is simply because we were trying to act constructively and persuade the Mexican authorities that it would be best for everyone to find an honorable and adequate solution. That is not possible now, since a meeting has already been held of which a delegation was arbitrarily and illegally excluded, and that is the Cuban delegation.

"They have said that the UN rules and the rules of the host country are different. Certainly, I am not a Head of State, but I am the only person in Monterrey to whom a Head of State delegated his representation, thus the only Head of State in Monterrey arbitrarily excluded from that meeting.

"It is not true that Cuba could have been represented by its Head of State, because he was asked, very clearly and categorically, to please leave Mexico as soon as possible."

On the other hand, our Foreign Minister, speaking over the phone for the Cuban TV Roundtable in the evening of March 22, said the following:

"Cuba was aware of the pressures that, prior to the conference, President Bush had been exerting on the Mexican government. President Bush had threatened that he would not attend the Summit if comrade Fidel were here.

"There was an invitation from the Preparatory Committee established by a UN General Assembly resolution and the letter from the two ambassadors that has just been released; afterwards, there was an official invitation from President Fox.

"Later on, comrade Fidel was asked not to attend the Summit, as it was his right, being the Head of State of a UN member country and having received the invitation of the UN Preparatory Committee to take part in a conference for which Cuba had been an active advocate.

"This is the historical truth, and he was asked --as we have said-- by a well authorized person in the Mexican government to make such a significant request. He was asked not to come, and in the light of Fidel's steadfast position in defense of Cuba's sovereign right to attend this conference, he was asked to be there only on Thursday morning and leave immediately after the lunch offered by the state governor.

"Comrade Fidel felt it was a necessity, and his duty, to explain to the delegates, and he did so carefully. He said why he could not stay here, but he was discreet and cautious. He also made a request that could have been met, as it was only logical, that comrade Alarcon, Speaker of our National Assembly, were allowed to take part in the rest of the functions organized by the conference.

"Actually, the capacity has been lacking to understand this rational and to comply with a reasonable request."

On the other hand, Castañeda was frantically denying Alarcon's and Felipe's statements.

During a press conference on March 21, and in response to a question from a journalist on whether the Mexican government had asked or suggested to the Cuban government that the Cuban President should adjust his agenda to avoid coming across President Bush, Castañeda replied:

"Absolutely not; at no time has any authorized official from the Mexican government raised any such idea, or any other similar, with the government of Cuba or the Cuban authorities."

As the press insisted, Castañeda added:

"There was no pressure, influence, negotiation, request, suggestion, or innuendo. If I had my dictionary of synonyms I could go on, but no other comes to my mind now. However, if you Blanche, can come up with any other, tell me, and I will still provide the same answer."

In the Mexican TV segment Zona Abierta, Castañeda reiterated:

"There was no pressure, at any time, by any Mexican official on Fidel Castro to make him leave before time."

On March 22, in a joint press conference with Bush, when Mr. Fox was asked about pressures to exclude Castro he said:

"There is nothing to that. Mr. Fidel Castro came to Mexico for the UN Conference; he came here, he made his contribution and he left for Cuba. End of story! It's that simple!"

In an interview given to Joaquin Lopez Doriga, and published by the daily newspaper La Jornada, when asked whether it was true that Castro had left, first, because Fox's government had asked him not to come, and second, because once here you had asked him to leave, Fox responded:

"No, not that I know, absolutely. It would be interesting and timely for you to indicate where has it all come from. I think that Castro is sufficiently mature, and has been in power for a number of years, for anything like this to curtail his freedom and his will. Castro was here in Monterrey, he took part in the conference, in the UN conference, and he then decided to go. Nobody forced him to do so."

On March 24, in an interview with the Aztec TV, when he was asked what had happened with me, Fox said:

"The same way he abruptly notified his visit and arrived the night before, he left. As simple as that; he came, he gave his speech or presentation, he was welcomed at the airport with due courtesy. I greeted him upon arrival, as I did with everyone else, I said good-bye, and he left. That simple. What's wrong with that? What's behind that? I don't understand."

At the same time, Bush was beatifically affirming that the United States had put no pressure on Mexico.

They were all lying, left and right.

If Castañeda had opened the dictionary of synonyms in the right page, he would have found that lying is equivalent to: deceiving, prevaricating, fabricating, misrepresenting, inventing, misleading, brewing, perjuring, falsifying, telling stories, distorting the truth, misstating, libeling, tricking, playing with the truth, swindling, pretending, simulating, pulling people's leg, etc., etc., etc.

Our country's credibility was put in question. According to a survey, almost fifty percent of Mexicans had been misled to distrust Cuba.

Granma's editorial of March 26 warned:

"Cuba has irrefutable proof of everything that happened which would sweep away any doubts. However, it has preferred not to use it, because it does not want to hurt Mexico, to damage its prestige, or to cause any political destabilization in that sister country."

[...]

"For the honor of Mexico, somehow such insults and aggressions against the Cuban people must come to an end. Cuba should not be forced to show the evidence it possesses."

That editorial concluded with the following statement:

"All we are asking for is an end to Mr. Castañeda's provocation, insults, lies and evil plans against Cuba. Otherwise we shall have no alternative but to make public that which we have not wished to make public and tear to pieces his false and cynical statements, whatever the consequences. And let no one doubt it!"

The word destabilization was used because the adventurous Mexican Foreign Minister dragged no other than the President of Mexico into his perfidy. It was impossible to produce our evidence without incriminating him. Perhaps, that led him to wrongly assume that we would take the blow and not open Pandora's box.

Our country, blockaded by the giant that today arouses so much fear and threatens the world with its missiles and bombers, whose arbitrary governments slander our Homeland and cynically write it in the list of countries that sponsor terrorism, our country could not stand that.

Still, despite everything, we did not wish to produce our evidence. We remained silent, much longer than ethic and truth would advise. But, then there was the last straw.

On Wednesday, April 10, the untimely and abject Judas who presides over Uruguay, assuming the inglorious role of a lackey that the Chekian Republic had been playing, submitted to the Commission on Human Rights the queer resolution against Cuba, conceived and hatched by Foreign Minister Castañeda with Washington.

There is something else, and I will open a parenthesis here. There was government that even threatened to sever relations with us. That government's Health Minister acted as a murderer when he rather let children die than buy the necessary vaccines from Cuba, the only country producing them with the adequate characteristics, according to a report issued by the French Institute "Pasteur" in response to a consultation from Uruguay. We have really been threatened and the only thing we can say is what are they waiting for to do it?

That will not prevent the arrival of our vaccines. While they were close to needing a new supply, the Uruguayan government presented in Geneva that infamous resolution. That same day, at 3:00 pm, a Cuban plane left Havana headed for Uruguay carrying 200,000 doses donated by Cuba.

We were really very upset when we had information of the first outbreak, which could have been prevented. We said to the Uruguayan people that we were willing to donate the vaccines. At that moment, the end of last December, they needed 71,000 doses. Moreover, the total number of vaccines they needed we had to take from our own reserves; we did it, and sent them over. This was hardly 15 weeks ago, when there was an outbreak in a countryside town.

Recently, there was an outbreak in the capital. Immediately, on April 7, we sent 200,000 doses that had been previously produced. We even paid for the transportation. There has been a controversy later because they want to deny that it was a donation, and they are bent on discounting its cost from an old debt.

Yes, we do have an old debt, not a big debt; it is not something that we cannot currently face in the short run. That default happened when we entered the special period, after the collapse of the socialist camp and the Soviet Union, and when the U.S. government, an ally of the Uruguayan government, or rather its master, intensified and tightened its blockade. Eleven million Cubans can bear witness to what that meant for our country.

We have indicated that we are willing to discuss that debt any time they want. But, what we do not accept is that that donation is not received as a donation, as they pretend, and nobody can impose us that view. We would never pay any debt with our reserve of vaccines that we needed to replace.

This is nothing new. There is a tradition, and the world knows our country and our policies. We do not go around lying or playing the demagogue. It is our right to refuse that our donation be demeaned. They are acting really mean. And I say that if they sever relations, the remaining vaccines will still arrive on time, perhaps, 800,000 doses, except if they would not let our plane land there. The fact remains that at 12:00 midnight on April 21 to 22, just hours after their treacherous stabbing in Geneva, the third supply of 200,000 doses arrived in Montevideo, and all the others will also be ready.

Two thousand and seven hundred Cuban doctors are working, free of charge, in Third World countries through the Comprehensive Health Care Program established by Cuba to assist those countries. I will not go into details; suffice it to say that it is not to pay any debt, nor is our people taking revenge for the actions undertaken against Cuba in the first years of the Revolution when every Latin American government sold out to the United States, except for Mexico, which is playing such a painful role now heading another great treason against Cuba, similar to that which occurred in those sad and shameful years of cowardice and brazen concessions.

The United States of America distributed our sugar quota, approximately 4 million tons, which until then had enjoyed preferential prices. Fortunately, this time there were some that did not join the perfidious plot.

It is necessary to remember that part of history, and the fact that we did not paid any debt with our blood. The only thing we pay we our blood is the debt we have we Humanity! Our basic duty of solidarity with other peoples.

That policy pursued by the Uruguayan government is mean and despicable. Cuba cannot be threatened! Nobody can threaten Cuba! For 43 years Cuba has lived under the threat of the giant, which is today three times stronger than it was then. We have stood our ground and we will continue to do so with honor, dignity and conscience, which is what explains the survival of our people and their Revolution.

Please, excuse me, for this parenthesis.

On April 15, the office of the President of Mexico issued an official communiqué informing that Mexico would vote for the resolution submitted by Uruguay.

We had learned of that decision a few days before. It responded to an agreement they had reached with

the United States. The most grotesque story is that there was even an attempt at bribing us and buying our silence about the developments in Monterrey. Amidst the dramatic events taking place in Venezuela, when Hugo Chavez' life was truly in danger and everything there seemed to have come to an end, in the afternoon of April 13, approximately 38 hours before the official communiqué of the 15, the Mexican ambassador in Cuba passed on a message from the Mexican government promising that Petróleos Mexicanos could take over from PDVSA, the Venezuelan oil deliveries that would be cut off.

It was a repugnant, cynical and misleading maneuver aimed at neutralizing our protest for their forthcoming felony in Geneva. The government of Mexico was always, systematically, opposed to any benefits that Cuba could obtain from international agreements such as that of San Jose. We very coldly said thanks and did not show the least interest in the hypocritical offer.

The promise not to sponsor, promote, or support a resolution against Cuba, made by both Castañeda and by President Fox during his visit to Cuba, had been despicably betrayed.

It could still happen that some of those listening might think: Very well, everything has been explained in an articulate and logical way but, Who can be sure that Castro, acting as a modern Shakespeare, has not invented this drama? To those who might be feeling this way, I ask them to listen for a few minutes to a tape where the exact words were recorded, with their precise tone and emphasis, both President Fox's words and mine.

If they so wish, the people attending this conference can immediately call Fox or Castañeda, and ask them whether it is true or not that this conversation took place on March 19, between 11:30 pm and 11:50 pm, approximately. Ask them whether they recognize those words and whether or not they were exactly the words spoken.

If anyone could prove that such a conversation never took place, and that those were not President Fox's words, I would firmly offer my immediate resignation to all my positions and responsibilities at the head of the Cuban State and Revolution. My honor would not permit me to continue at the head of this country.

On the other hand, I would like for the authors of so many lies and enormous slanders with which they have wanted to manipulate and deceive the Mexican people and the world public opinion, to react with the same sense of dignity and honor.

The peoples are not disgraceful masses that can be deceived and governed without any ethics, honor and respect.

The aftermath of telling these truths could be that diplomatic relations are severed. However, the fraternal and historical bonds between the peoples of Mexico and Cuba will last forever.

Havana, Cuba

April 22, 2002

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