

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. FELIPE PÉREZ ROQUE, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, ON AGENDA ITEM 29 “NECESSITY OF ENDING THE ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL EMBARGO IMPOSED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AGAINST CUBA”**

**New York, 4 November 2003**

Mr. President: Excellencies:

The economic, financial and commercial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba must be lifted.

The blockade against Cuba qualifies, in conformity with the 1948 Geneva Convention, as a crime of genocide.

The blockade is a legal aberration. It violates the United Nations Charter. It prevents international trade and curtails free navigation. It gets to the point of penalizing the businesspeople from other countries who invest in Cuba.

The vulgar and disrespectful tone used in this hall just minutes ago by the representative of the United States obliges me to depart from my prepared text. I fully understand the murmuring that followed his rude comments.

I believe that such a lowly and disrespectful attack can only be the result of the desperation and isolation of the U.S. government in its policy towards Cuba.

The representative of the United States has resorted here to insults and personal attacks. But Cuba will not follow this example. We do not need to make up for a lack of arguments with offensive language and empty insults. I can assure this Assembly that the representative of the United States has lied, and I am going to prove it. I have a duty to denounce these lies, because this Assembly has the right to know the truth; it deserves respect, and it deserves for the representatives of the world's countries gathered in this room to behave with a minimum of respect and decorum.

I have counted 15 lies or insulting attacks, which I will briefly comment on later, but which I cannot fail to refute right now.

First of all, the representative of the United States has said that the blockade against Cuba is justified on the basis of what he called “Cuba’s regrettable human rights record.” Lies! The United States has no moral authority or right to judge the human rights situation in Cuba; it should attend to its own human rights situation, it should deal with the horrendous human rights violations that take place in its own territory, and the ones it provokes outside its borders.

Second, he has said that the blockade against Cuba is a bilateral affair. Lies! The blockade obstructs business with and investment in Cuba around the entire planet, through the application of the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts, as I will discuss later in my speech.

Third, he has said that the blockade was established after the expropriations. Lies! The measures of the economic blockade and other forms of economic war against Cuba date back to before the nationalizations that were justly undertaken by the Cuban Revolution.

Fourth, he has said that Cuba did not offer compensation. Lies! The Cuban nationalization laws established compensation, and in fact, this compensation was accepted by all foreign owners in Cuba, including Europeans, Canadians and Latin Americans, everyone except for citizens of the United States, whose government prohibited them from accepting compensation.

Fifth, he has said that the blockade is aimed at bringing freedom and democracy to Cuba. Lies! The blockade is aimed at turning Cuba back into a colony of the United States.

He has also said that last year, 175,000 U.S. citizens traveled legally to Cuba. Lies! A large number of them had to violate the laws of the United States itself to come here. Moreover, if the U.S. government is not afraid of them coming here, then why doesn't it allow them to travel? Why are there more than 2000 U.S. citizens currently facing legal proceedings for this very reason?

He has said that Cuba does not pay its debts. Lies!

He has said that the poverty of the Cuban people is not a result of the blockade, that the blockade is not an obstacle. He has lied.

On the other hand, it is true that we are a poor Third World country, but there is not a single Cuban citizen who lacks for medical care, unlike the United States, where there are 44 million people who have no right to health care services.

He has said that "brutal repression" was imposed in Cuba. Lies! Punishment was handed down, in accordance with Cuban laws, to mercenaries who received money from the United States and worked to provide a justification for the blockade and promote subversion in Cuba.

He has referred to the President of Cuba, Comandante Fidel Castro, as a dictator. This Assembly knows very well that the government of the United States and President Bush are attempting to impose a fascist dictatorship on a global scale.

Finally, he has referred to the Cuban government as an “evil and dictatorial regime,” to which they would like to say, “Hasta la vista, baby!” Never have such disrespectful words been heard in this Assembly!

Cuba accepts that there may be differences of opinion, different viewpoints, different ideologies; but it believes that there must be a minimum of respect towards the delegates and the countries represented here.

I am sorry to say that the representative of the United States will never in his entire lifetime have the slightest possibility of saying “Hasta la vista, baby,” to the people of Cuba. It is the people of Cuba, with the support of the international community, who will say, “Hasta la vista, blockade; hasta la vista, genocide.” And in response to his disrespectful comments, we say right here that we will not be saying “Hasta la vista” to our leader, our President, but rather, “Patria o muerte! Venceremos!”

I will now return to my speech, in order to say:

The blockade is a flagrant, massive and systematic violation of the human rights of the Cuban people. The only human rights abuses committed in Cuba are the ones provoked against our people by the blockade and the ones committed by the United States at the Naval Base in Guantánamo, which it occupies against our will. It is also deleterious to the rights of the American people, the rights of the Cubans who live in the United States and the rights of those nationals from other countries who wish to trade with and invest freely in Cuba.

I am not saying a single word here against the people of the United States; we consider them our friends, and we do not blame them. We believe that the people of the United States are also victims, like us, of their government’s cruel and senseless policy. I do not blame the people, I blame their government, which subordinates its policy towards Cuba to the corrupt interests of a minority of Cuban-born mobsters living in the city of Miami.

The blockade is the greatest obstacle to Cuba’s socio-economic development. And I reaffirm this here, refuting the claims made by the representative of the United States. It has caused losses to our country in the order of over US\$ 72 billion, no less than 1.6 billion dollars a year, in addition to the aggressions, the invasions, and over 600 assassination plots against our Head of State. How many shortages and hardships would we have been spared without the blockade? How much farther would Cuba have gone in its noble endeavor of equality and social justice had it not had to deal with this ruthless and relentless blockade for more than four decades?

If the government of the United States is so certain that the Cuban government and authorities, the historic leadership of the Cuban Revolution, do not have the support of the people, then why don’t they lift the blockade? If they say that we are using it as a pretext, then why don’t they take this pretext away? Why don’t they lift the blockade? Why don’t they allow U.S. citizens to visit Cuba?

The blockade is a cruel and absurd policy, that finds no support within or outside the United States. Last year, 173 member States voted against the blockade at this General Assembly. They understand that the crime being committed against Cuba today could very well be committed against any other country tomorrow.

It is false – I say this here -- to think that the Cubans who live in the United States support the blockade. Only a corrupt and greedy minority, that has not hesitated to organize and execute terrorist actions against our people, is interested in its perpetuity. They dream of Cuba's return to the hands of US troops; they dream of revenge and pillage. President Bush – and the truth must be told in this room -- is hostage to the spurious interests of that Cuban-American minority living in Miami. He owes them the Presidency, controversially reached back in 2000 by the close margin of a vote at this country's Supreme Court of Justice.

The President of Cuba was reelected in our National Assembly, made up of representatives elected by direct and secret ballot, throughout the entire country, in elections where more than 95% of the population participated. The President of the United States was declared president by the Supreme Court, in the midst of an international scandal that left the country leaderless for over a month.

However, a growing mass – increasingly less silent and more active – objects to this policy, that curtails normal relations with their families and with Cuba.

The United States must recognize that the blockade is unjustifiable from the moral and ethical standpoints. It must recognize that it is a failure, that it causes its own isolation. We as Cubans, far from surrendering, are more steadfast and independent; far from dividing, we have come together; far from feeling discouraged, we have found new strengths to defend our sovereignty and our right to freedom.

Mr. President:

The United States must repeal the Helms-Burton Act. It has no right to impose its laws on the rest of the world. It has no right to tell the Cubans how their own country should be organized. It has no right to finance and organize subversion in Cuba. It has no right to sanction the businesspeople from other countries for having relations with Cuba.

The United States must repeal the Torricelli Act. It has no right to prevent the vessels from other countries from calling on Cuban ports. It has no right to prohibit the subsidiaries of US companies based in third countries from trading with Cuba, in violation of the laws of those countries in which they are headquartered.

The United States must allow Cuba to export to its territory. It is not entitled to close off the exports of sugar, nickel, tobacco, seafood, vaccines and biotech items, computer software and other Cuban productions.

The United States must allow Cuba to import freely from its territory. And not only foodstuffs, but everything else, with the exception of weapons – in which we are not interested. It must eliminate the ludicrous restrictions that currently hinder and limit to a large extent the sales of farm produce to Cuba.

The United States must allow its citizens to travel freely to Cuba. Why is the Administration chasing after them? Is it by any chance afraid that they may become acquainted with the truth? Is it not ridiculous to go after a grandmother who is going to Cuba to ride on her bicycle? Why did the representative of the United States not refer here to the case of Mrs. Joan Slote, a 74-year-old woman fined \$8500 for traveling to Cuba? What is really democratic: to respect the clear and majority-based vote of both the House and the Senate or defend – with stubbornness and shortsightedness – vulgar electoral interests?

The United States must cease preventing the free exchange of ideas. It must cease hindering the visits by Cuban scientists, athletes and artists to this country. It must allow Cuba to acquire top-of-the-line equipment and technology for Internet access.

The United States must allow Cuba to use the dollar for its external commercial transactions. With what right does it seize today Cuba's payments to companies or governments from third countries?

The United States must eliminate the absurd prohibition that prevents the import into its territory of products manufactured in third countries if these contain Cuban raw materials.

The United States must allow the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to grant credits to Cuba. On this hemisphere, these credits were on many occasions stolen by corrupt Presidents and later on deposited with American banks. That has not happened and will never happen in the case of Cuba!

The United States must authorize its banks to make loans to Cuba and allow its enterprises to trade with and invest freely in our country. Are not these private banks and enterprises?

The United States must prevent Bacardi company from stealing the Havana Club rum brand name. Its Government should not be interested – and I want to state this clearly here -- in a conflict of trademarks and patents with Cuba.

The United States must return the frozen assets to Cuba and prevent the Cuban money frozen in U.S. banks from being stolen by traffickers in influence and greedy petty lawyers from Miami.

The United States must return to Cuba the territory currently occupied, against our will, by the Guantánamo Naval Base.

The United States must repeal the Cuban Adjustment Act and accept our proposal to engage in extensive cooperation to eliminate alien smuggling.

The United States must release the five young Cubans who are unjustly imprisoned and persecute the terrorists who roam the streets of Miami.

In brief, the United States must cease its aggression against Cuba. It must recognize Cuba's right to its self-determination. It must allow the Cubans to live in peace. It must recognize that since 1 January 1959 – 45 years soon – Cuba is a free and independent country.

Mr. President:

President Bush said a few days ago that “Cuba is not going to change by its own choice.” He is mistaken. Cuba changes every day. There is no more profound and permanent change than a Revolution. It will change, yes, but increasingly towards more Revolution and Socialism. Towards more equality, more justice, more freedom and more solidarity. And so it will be even with President Bush's objection, because as expressed 123 years ago by the Apostle of our Independence, José Martí: “Before relinquishing the endeavor of making the Homeland free and prosperous, the Southern Sea will blend into the Northern Sea and a snake will be born out of an eagle's egg!”

The President of the United States has also said: “But Cuba must change.” And I want to call attention to that statement, because if that statement embodies a threat of new actions against my country, as Cubans have understood it, the President of the United States should recall that he is the tenth to do so in these four decades of blockade and aggressions that Cuba has managed to overcome.

He should also know that his current difficulties merely pale against those that he would have if he messes with Cuba. He should know that there is no human or natural force capable of causing the Cubans to relinquish their dreams of justice and freedom.

Our being noble should not be mistaken with being weak. Our absence of hatred should not be mistaken with fear. Our willingness to engage in dialogue should not be mistaken with the illusion of surrendering a people that has not been defeated. There should be no mistake in believing that Cuba can ever be dominated. It would be very costly for the aggressor.

Finally, I ask you, Excellencies, on behalf of the generous and courageous people that there in my Homeland is closely following what you will all decide today, to vote

in favor of draft resolution A/58/L.4 entitled “Necessity of Ending the Economic, Commercial and Financial Embargo Imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.”

I apologize for the disrespectful and hate-filled words spoken here by my adversary, and reiterate to you the respect and gratitude of my people.

I am asking you to vote in favor of Cuba’s right – which is also today everyone’s right.

Thank you very much.