

STATEMENT BY MR. FELIPE PÉREZ ROQUE, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA, TO THE LOCAL AND FOREIGN MEDIA, AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. 10 DECEMBER 2007

Felipe Pérez: Good morning. We would like to thank all local and foreign correspondents for being here with us today.

We have asked you to come to inform that, shortly, Cuba will become a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is the political decision made by our country today, 10 December, World Day of Human Rights, when we celebrate the 59th anniversary of the proclamation by the UN General Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The rights contained in both covenants, which are some of the most important international instruments in terms of human rights, are extensively covered by our national legislation and, particularly, by the work and performance of the Cuban Revolution right from its victory on 1 January 1959.

This decision, which should materialize in the coming months, is indicative that our country will always maintain close cooperation with the UN system, on the basis of respect for our national sovereignty and for the right of the Cuban people to self-determination.

While the manipulations against Cuba persisted in the field of human rights; while the US Government turned the former Commission on Human Rights into an Inquisition tribunal to persecute the countries that rebelled against imperial domination; while attempts were made to manipulate the human rights issue against Cuba to justify the blockade and the aggressions against our country; while the anti-Cuban practice in the area of human rights continued to prevail, particularly in Geneva, at the former Commission, where the US imposed a resolution every year through ruthless pressures and blackmail; while all of that happened, there were no conditions whatsoever to assess new commitments by Cuba to the UN machinery in the area of human rights. However, that situation has changed radically with the inception of the new Human Rights Council, of which Cuba was a founding member, with the vote of over two-thirds of the members of the international community – and because, as known, the spurious mandate imposed by the US to monitor the Cuban situation was also discontinued.

Since a new situation has arisen, in which the issue is not manipulated against Cuba, in which there has been failure after failure of the anti-Cuban schemes by the US, after twenty years of battle by Cuba in favor of the truth and in defense of our principles and our dignity, conditions are now ripe to take new steps indicative of Cuba's political will to cooperate with the UN and to make its contribution and experience available to the international community in this matter.

Cuba has never acted and will never act under pressure. Once the Human Rights Council decided and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly confirmed the discontinuation of that spurious anti-Cuban mandate, our country then advanced several initiatives for international cooperation in the field of human rights. Thus, we were recently visited by the UN rapporteur for the right to food; thus, we announce today the decision of the Cuban Government to sign, in the first quarter of next year, these two human rights covenants: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

And, also, in the future, our country will extend invitations to other figures that represent special procedures in the Human Rights Council, as an indication that in a scenario in which there is no longer any manipulation of the issue against our country, where the twenty-year-long scheme by the US Government was utterly defeated, our country can send clear signals and attest to its will to cooperate and emphasize its commitment to the international defense of human rights.

The decision to move forward in enhancing the formal commitment – because the real commitment has always existed and because it was the Cuban Revolution that guaranteed the respect for the human rights of the Cubans – by signing the two covenants is another example of what our country can do without any political conditionalities and without being subjected to that unfair practice.

So today, 10 December, World Day of Human Rights, our country – in a free and sovereign fashion, without any outside pressures and keeping in line with our own conscience, with the acts of our own free will, exercising our sovereignty – announces, as a new step in Cuba's commitment, the signing of these two important human rights instruments.

Pursuant to the commitment that we entered into by signing the inception of the new Human Rights Council and its procedures, we are also getting ready to report, in March 2009, on our performance and be part of the universal periodic review mechanism established by the new Council. Under the draw conducted on an equal footing for all countries, ours has to report in March 2009. We are seriously getting ready to reach that moment in a spirit of cooperation and with the will to display our results, our accomplishments, our shortcomings and difficulties, and also to hear the views and opinions of other players on this issue.

This will of Cuba will remain as long as the current situation prevails, which we hope will not change – of not being singled out, of non-selectivity, non-discrimination and politicization of the human rights issue to attack and justify the aggressions against those countries that do not yield to the imperial diktat. As long as that situation prevails, as now, our country will be free to move forward down this path.

If, unfortunately and against our desire and our aspirations, the issue is once again politicized and the atmosphere of cooperation and respect for the countries now prevailing in the Human Rights Council becomes rarified, our country would be compelled – and would not hesitate to stand its ground again – to hoist the flags that we victoriously defended for twenty years until we managed to utterly and definitely defeat the practice orchestrated by successive US Administrations against Cuba.

In addition to this announcement, on the 59th anniversary of the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN General Assembly and when we start the year to celebrate its 60th anniversary, Cuba reiterates today its demand that the US Government cease its ruthless economic, financial and commercial blockade, imposed on our people for almost 50 years, which is a flagrant, massive and systematic violation of the human rights of our people – as has been overwhelmingly demanded by the UN General Assembly in 16 successive resolutions.

On a day like today, it is worth recalling that our people will soon move into its fifth decade of suffering from the brutal and genocidal blockade that attempts to subdue us through starvation and disease.

On the day that the world commemorates the World Day of Human Rights, we reiterate our demand that the US Government heed the opinion of the international community and lift the blockade on Cuba.

Secondly, on behalf of the Cuban people, we demand that the US Government immediately close, without any further delays or justifications, the shameful torture center that it continues to operate at its naval base in Guantánamo, where all sorts of harassment and vexation have been carried out, as well as cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment against the prisoners, in breach of all the guarantees provided for by International Law for detained people. In addition to the closing of this shameful center, we demand that the US Government return to our country the territory that it currently occupies in an illegal manner against our will in Guantánamo, taking away from Cuba the practice of the right to sovereignty in that portion of our soil.

We demand today, on the World Day of Human Rights, that the President of the United States and that the US Government close down the torture center in Guantánamo and return to our homeland the territory that they occupy illegally.

Thirdly, on a day like today, we demand the immediate release of the Five Cuban Heroes: Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, Ramón Labañino Salazar, Fernando González Llort, Antonio Guerrero Rodríguez and René González Sehwerert, political prisoners held in US jails, subjected to unjust and harsh convictions, subjected to isolation cells for long periods of time and to other cruel, inhumane and degrading actions for over nine years – and we now demand, as they are going through their tenth year in captivity, that they be released.

On behalf of the Cuban people, we particularly demand that Adriana Pérez O'Connor, the wife of Gerardo Hernández Nordelo, and Olga Salanueva Arango, the wife of René González Sehwerert, be able to visit their husbands, whom they last saw in 1998. We demand respect for their rights and we challenge the President of the United States and the US Government to allow these two women, daughters of our nation, to visit their husbands in the prisons where they are now serving harsh sentences.

Fourthly, on behalf of the Cuban families mourning the loss of their loved ones, as a result of the acts of terrorism by Luis Posada Carriles; on behalf of those families that lost children, parents and siblings, we demand that the US Government detain international terrorist Luis Posada Carriles, who is walking freely in the city of Miami protected by the Bush Administration, and try him for terrorism and send him to prison; or that he be extradited to Venezuela, as has demanded that country's government.

Lastly, I would like to express our satisfaction over the news that the Cuban Medical Brigade currently working in Guatemala, composed of some 300 health workers, stationed there since Hurricane Mitch swept through Central America in 1998, was presented with the National Human Rights Awards, bestowed by that brotherly country.

The Cuban doctors, since their arrival in the rural and mountainous areas, in the farthest and most remote places of the Guatemalan geography, have had over 22 million appointments and performed more than 55,000 deliveries. In this recognition of their noble endeavor, there is also recognition of all the Cubans who throughout the world are currently making their generous contribution to the respect for human rights; particularly, for the right of millions of people to life.

I would like to recall today, on the World Day of Human Rights, that as we speak there are 37,000 Cuban health workers providing services in 79 countries. Of those, over 18,000 are medical doctors. There are 37,000 health cooperators in 79 countries and over 18,000 of them are doctors! In a few days, we will hit the target figure of 1 million patients with free surgeries through Operation Miracle. A million patients from 32 countries have regained their eyesight over the last few years as a result of the implementation of Operation Miracle, fostered by our country. These patients have been operated on by Cuban doctors, nurses and technicians, either in Cuba or in their respective countries.

I would also like to underscore the fact that our universities have provided government-sponsored scholarships to nearly 30,000 students from 121 countries that are currently enrolled in them. These are children from poor families, on many occasions from rural areas in their countries. Of those nearly 30,000 students, some 23,000 are being trained in Cuba as doctors.

In recalling that our country has graduated more than 45,000 Third-World youths in these years of the Revolution, of which almost 35,000 are from Africa, we must evoke Fidel's remarks: "Without culture, there is no freedom possible". And we must recall Martí, who said that "Being educated is the only one to be free." And I must also underscore – because of what I have just said – that with the Cuban literacy method *Yes, I Can*, designed by Cuban professors and implemented with the participation of thousands of Cuban pedagogical advisers, some 2.7 million illiterate people in 22 countries have been taught to read and write; and another 600,000 illiterate people are currently studying, learning to read and write in the languages of their countries, not only in Spanish.

In recalling these figures and confirming with modesty but with healthy pride that the Cubans are not only fighting to build a society with all fairness and full equality of opportunities for all its children, a socialist society with equality of opportunity for all, where justice can be attained, I must also express our pride in knowing that our fellow countrymen and women did go to cure, to teach and to fight off apartheid and colonialism in Africa – where over 350,000 Cuban voluntary fighters, both men and women, went to defeat the troops of apartheid, making it possible to obliterate, right in the midst of the 20th century, a brutal form of discrimination and exclusion of men over skin color, where more than 2,000 sons and daughters of our nation laid down their lives fighting and were instrumental in preserving Angola's territorial integrity, in the inception of Namibia as an independent country, in the release of Nelson Mandela and the dismantling of the cruel apartheid system, which was kept alive through the shameful support of many who now try to forget that past in which they were accessories to the apartheid regime, which they provided with weapons and which they helped violate UN resolutions, the first of all being the US Government. Therefore, in doing so, I would like to express our pride that we are not only working for and defending in Cuba the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for our people, but that we are also fighting in other countries of the world so that these can finally become real rights within everyone's reach and stop being rights just proclaimed in paper.

Today, we express our certainty that neither the manipulations schemed by the US Government with the participation of a handful of mercenaries, who they pay and instruct in our country, nor the threats or its abundant money to pay for defections and disloyalty, nor its media campaigns or its might over the international mass media, nor its pressures against other governments to follow them in their anti-Cuba campaigns, will cause our people to stay off course in defending human rights for our country and for other countries.

Cuba celebrates this day, 10 December, World Day of Human Rights, standing tall and with the conviction that its people has maintained and will always maintain in victory a Revolution that truthfully ushered in for our people the real enjoyment of human rights, of all human rights for all the children of our homeland!

Thank you very much (Ovation).