

January 17, 2011

PLEBISCITE NOW

On January 13, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement that insulted and threatened the peaceful movement for human rights and democracy in Cuba, for no other reason than the fact that some of its members spoke with a delegation from the U.S. government, at the delegation's request. In making that request, these visitors to our country acknowledged that Cuba is home to not only a government but also a people with a diverse range of opinions.

Cuban government officials held a dialogue with this delegation that they now consider interventionist since it dared converse with Cuban dissidents. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs directs its greatest insult at itself, when it expresses its strong interest in "reaffirming the willingness already conveyed by the Cuban government to engage in a respectful dialogue with the U.S. government on any topic, provided that such dialogue be a dialogue among equals." It is embarrassing how the Cuban government offers to dialogue "on any topic" and "among equals" with a foreign government while it belittles and excludes its own citizens, not only Cuban dissidents but the Cuban people as a whole, as it denies them the ability to exercise many of their rights.

The issue seems to be the following: foreign governments, public figures, and institutional representatives are good or bad depending on whether they do or do not recognize and do or do not speak with those of us who are working to defend human rights in Cuba. This reveals the essence of the conflict between the government and the Cuban people and the reason dissidents are discredited and persecuted: because dissidents are those who are promoting real change: i.e., freedom, reconciliation, and the recognition of all of the rights of the Cuban people, both in the law and in practice.

On Friday, December 17, 2010, *El País* published information attributed by Wikileaks to reports from the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba, which state that the opposition does not have programs "designed to appeal to a broad cross section of Cuban society." According to *El País*, the United States is of the opinion that Cubans are interested in traveling and living comfortably, and human rights are not their priority. The newspaper cites a report from the U.S. Interests Section that recommends that its government "look elsewhere, including within the government itself, to spot the most likely successors to the Castro regime."

Despite the differences in language, there are several parallels between those leaked reports and the beliefs held by the Cuban regime: both discredit the democratic opposition and refuse to acknowledge that freedom and rights are the priorities of our people. We assure everyone that the Cuban people have a right to rights, and we proclaim that *those anticipated successors to the regime will not be successors, because there will be no regime; instead, they, like all Cubans, will be free women and men, with rights, living in peace in their own country, which is better than living with privileges and power sustained by an oppressive order. This is our hope and our resolve.*

No one should dispute the fact that the changes the people desire are freedom, reconciliation, and all of their rights. The opposition, both within Cuba and abroad, peacefully works and struggles to achieve those goals. But what the Cuban people lack most is a voice. We have no voice, no democratic means of expressing ourselves while the government and others in the world pretend to speak on our behalf. For that reason, we demand that the Cuban government hold a **plebiscite** so that the people can make themselves heard and sovereignly approve or reject the following proposal:

Should free, democratic elections be convened based on a new elections act and in conditions that ensure that all Cubans have the right to be nominated and elected democratically, exercise freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and organize themselves freely in political parties and social organizations in a fully pluralist society? Yes, or no?

The exact wording might change, but holding such a plebiscite would truly be a sign of respect for the sovereignty of our people, and supporting it would demonstrate that the world truly respects the self-determination of the Cuban people. Let no one, ever again, speak for all Cubans. Ask the people themselves in a plebiscite.

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On behalf of the Christian Liberation Movement
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Translated by Ashley Caja.