

Cuba: Looking forward to 2000

Ten years ago, a small group of us, inspired by the Gospel, formed the Christian Liberation Movement to serve our people. Let us thank God and all who have helped us for our ability to continue serving our country.

Right now, decisions are being made regarding the direction that Cuban society could take, regarding the future of our children. The Cuban people cannot be ignored; they have to make their presence known and take control of their destiny.

This message is not intended to shock or agitate or promote fruitless laments that are of no use to the Cuban people. We have to ask ourselves: Where are we? Where are they leading us? And, most importantly, where do we want to go? The answer to this last question leads us to the decision to embark upon a new path to overcome this full-blown crisis and begin to build a new society as the year 2000 approaches.

We have to make a concerted effort to better ourselves at this juncture, as there has been a major shift toward social decay, higher levels of corruption, and economic inequality, propped up by oppression and the mechanisms of fear. Worst of all is the hopelessness, the presumption that we have no future. Yet there is someone who can change the negative bent of this process: the Cuban people. We, the Cuban people, must be the protagonists of our history.

An analysis of current conditions and our love for our country should give us the strength to transform it:

- Free healthcare and education are an asset to our society. They are the fruit of the Cuban people's labor and enterprise, and so the Cuban people have a right to them. Free healthcare and education should be preserved and improved. That said, we are all suffering from the poor shape these services are in. The only way to keep them free and effective is to make the right political and economic changes so we can unleash the creative potential of our society. The love and sacrifice of our doctors, nurses, teachers and other health and education workers are the key forces sustaining these services, but these workers also have rights and they have been relegated to a disadvantageous position, like most Cuban workers.
- The solution to this is not a conflict between patients and doctors or between students, families, and teachers, but rather a community effort in which everyone demands their rights and improvements to these services, either through existing structures or through newly formed associations that defend their interests and the interests of Cuban society with positive initiatives and demands for the changes that are needed, both in those settings and throughout the country.
- The majority of Cubans are religious, and they have the right to have their children receive an education in Christian values. Everyone—relatives, parents, students, and teachers—must work to achieve this goal. Free education is a right, but it does not grant the State the

authority to teach students to unconditionally support those who govern. The State has the obligation to educate children and young people as free individuals, teach them to love their neighbors, and help them develop themselves on all fronts.

- The dechristianization of Cuban culture that has prevailed for decades has largely resulted in a spiritual hollowing out of Cuban society, which changed Cubans' lives, self-esteem, respect for others, and family stability for the worst. Some would call this a crisis of values. Today, as many Cubans seek to rekindle their relationship with God and with a church, they must also work as citizens: not only to ensure freedom of worship, but to ensure their right to build temples, their right to use the media, which belong to the people, and their right to express the values of their faith in newly formed associations and initiatives in the political, social, and cultural spheres.
- Many men and women are imprisoned for political reasons in Cuba, because they sought to defend the rights of all Cubans. We demand that they be released without being sent into exile. We also call upon our fellow citizens who have ignored this situation out of ignorance or for other reasons. Cuban society can hardly achieve its rights if it does not show solidarity with those who have suffered to win us those rights.
- There has been no economic opening for the Cuban people. Though small personal businesses are allowed, in practice the State hinders their operations. The State pays workers in Cuban pesos but payment for many basic necessities must be made in dollars, at prices abysmally out of proportion with workers' purchasing power. The economic contribution of Cubans in exile keeps millions of Cubans from falling into extreme poverty. The Cuban citizen has become the customer of the State, which follows cruel market rules while continuing to impose a closed system that it calls socialism.
- As a result, those in power live as true aristocrats, blue-blooded revolutionaries, who hold the best positions in the small doses of capitalism that have been incorporated into that system. The disparities between the wealthy minority and the poor majority are widening. Poverty is on the rise, and it is especially heartbreaking when it affects defenseless children and older adults. Many Cubans who, frankly, gave their best years to the ideals of the revolution are now frustrated to learn that the power and privilege of a small group prevails while the majority have no apparent hope.
- We demand an end to exile. The legal status of "definitive exit," which is used to punish Cubans who have left or are leaving the country to establish themselves elsewhere, should be abolished. All Cubans have the right to live in their homeland and the right to come and go freely, with no extortionary time limits or taxes. Those Cubans who have left Cuba are an integral part of our nation, regardless of where they roam. Their rights as Cuban citizens should be respected.
- To those Cubans in exile who are trying to craft U.S. policy on Cuba or who support the existing U.S. policy on Cuba: we urge you not to waste any more efforts on this endeavor. We, the Cuban people, are the only ones who can solve our problems.

- Perhaps due to a lack of communication or because they are elsewhere, it has been hard for Cubans in exile, both as individuals and as part of their various groups, to support initiatives or projects other than their own. It is time that we all recognize that the peaceful paths that the Cuban people want to travel come from within Cuba. We are sure that our brothers and sisters of the Cuban diaspora are fully able and willing to participate in our people's efforts to achieve peaceful change, with the same spirit of reconciliation that informs our work within Cuba.
- Across the globe, there is a false dichotomy of two positions on Cuba: the first, the economic embargo and restrictive laws that result in the suffering of the Cuban people, which the Cuban government uses as an excuse to justify political stagnation; the second, the insistence on economic, cultural, and political ties, which directly involves a system under which foreigners and the Cuban elite enjoy privileges while the Cuban people are denied their rights and the ability to participate in such a relationship with dignity.
- Both positions are ethically unacceptable and contrary to the Cuban people's interests, feelings, and rights. In both cases, the doors to the government or to the system are opened or closed on the pretext that it will benefit the Cuban people, without ever getting input from the Cuban people themselves. The fair, ethically acceptable position would be one that opens our country's doors and allows other nations to establish ties without excluding Cubans "on the island and off" so that they can participate in such a relationship with their rights and dignity intact. That is what respect for our self-determination truly means.
- We will not let Cuba be carved up. Cuba will not be a stage for settling political or ideological rivalries or for summing up the EAST-WEST conflict or any other conflict. We also will not let Cuba be transformed into an island of pleasure or a paradise for prostitution, or a contested market, or someone's area of influence. We want to open our borders in fraternity with the rest of the world, but not as people whose humanity has been diminished. "We, the Cuban people, have the right to our rights," and we know how we ourselves can implement the project we have developed with the involvement of all of us, each according to our experiences and spiritual values.

WALKING TOWARDS 2000

We must acknowledge one truth: the changes we need in Cuba will not occur until we, the Cuban people, demand them and carry them out. Experience shows that what we lose when we pretend and endure in silence is much greater than what we risk when we demand our rights with dignity. We must act by freeing ourselves from fear and from cynicism. How much longer will the hopes of many ride on the result of a lottery, on loading their families up on a raft, or on living a phony life to adapt?

In the Varela Project, we have proposed a popular referendum to ensure that Cuban legislation upholds the Cuban people's participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation.

Each and every Cuban citizen must strive for their right to participate, without waiting for something to happen and without fear. Their right to participate with a critical eye, without hurting others, in free associations with initiatives and in solidarity with others, because the individualistic mentality of "every man for himself" is sinking us all. Openness must begin with the **individual liberation** of each and every Cuban citizen, leaving bitterness and everyday complaints behind in favor of freely exercising the right to express our opinions without waiting for someone to grant us that right. This renewed spirit of liberation and reconciliation, these individual or collective initiatives in defense of our interests and to demand changes to our laws and respect for our legal rights, these efforts to develop proposals and implement our own projects to improve our surroundings and all of society, and this demand for positive change will all join together to create a **SOCIAL MOVEMENT** involving all Cubans, which will transform society and open a new path as we make strides toward the year 2000.

Working toward that social movement involving all Cubans will be our task in our service to the nation.

Cuba has strong foundations on which we can build a bright future for our country. We should not be scared of anything; all we have to do is commit ourselves to a new attitude as the year 2000 approaches and overcome the alienating mindset of "there's nothing to do but wait." Quite the contrary—there's everything to do; we just have to do it. "Change will never arrive unless we begin that change here and now."

CHRISTIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT
(On the 10th Anniversary of Its Founding. September 1988 -1998)

Translated by Ashley Caja