

SPEECH GIVEN BY OSWALDO PAYÁ SARDIÑAS UPON RECEIVING THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S SAKHAROV PRIZE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (December 17, 2002)

*Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas,
Sakharov Prize winner.*

I would like to thank the President, Pat Cox, and this Parliament, which represents many of the peoples of Europe.

You have awarded the Sakharov Prize to the people of Cuba; I say this because the Cuban people richly deserve such recognition. I say this without excluding any of my compatriots, whatever their political position, because rights do not have any particular political, racial or cultural allegiance. Nor do dictatorships have any particular political allegiance, they are neither of the right nor of the left, they are simply dictatorships. In my country there are thousands of men and women fighting for the rights of all Cubans in the midst of persecution. Hundreds of them are imprisoned simply for proclaiming and defending these rights, and I am therefore accepting this award on behalf of them.

I say that this prize is for all Cubans because I believe that, by means of this prize, Europe wishes to say to them: 'You also have the right to rights'.

We were all convinced of this, but there were times when it seemed that that truth was not so evident to many people in the world.

I have not come here to ask for support for the opposition to the Cuban Government, nor to condemn those who persecute us. It is of no help to Cuba for some people in the world to take sides with the Cuban Government or with their opponents, on the basis of ideology. We want people to take sides with the Cuban people, with all Cubans. And this means supporting respect for all their rights, supporting openness, supporting the demand that our people be consulted through the ballot box on the changes we are demanding. We ask for solidarity so that our people may be given a voice through the ballot box, as the Varela Project proposes.

Many people have related this prize to the Varela Project, and they are right, because the thousands of Cubans who, in the midst of repression, have signed this referendum petition, are making a decisive contribution to the changes Cuba needs. These changes would mean participation in economic and cultural life, they would mean political and civil rights and national reconciliation. This would represent the true exercise of self-determination for our people. We must put an end to the myth that we Cubans must live without rights in order to sustain the independence and sovereignty of our country.

Father Félix Varela taught us that independence and national sovereignty are inseparable from the exercise of fundamental rights. The Cubans living in Cuba and those abroad, as one people, have the will and the ability to build a democratic, fair and free society, without hate or revenge, as José Martí dreamt: 'With everybody and for the good of everybody'.

We have not chosen the peaceful route as a tactic, but because it is inseparable from the goal of our people. Experience shows us that violence creates more violence and that when political changes are carried out in this way, it leads to new forms of oppression and injustice. Our wish is that violence and force are never again used to overcome crises or unjust governments. This time we will carry out the changes by means of this civic movement which is already opening up a new stage in the history of Cuba, in which dialogue, democratic participation and solidarity will prevail. In that way we will build a true peace.

The heroic Cuban civic fighters, the citizens who sign the Varela Project, are not carrying arms. We do not have a single weapon. We are holding out both arms, offering our hands to all Cubans, as brothers, and to all the peoples of the world. The first victory we can claim is that we do not have hate in our hearts. We therefore say to those who persecute and try to dominate us: you are my brother, I do not hate you, but you are no longer going to dominate me through fear, I do not want to impose my truth, and I do not want you to impose yours, let us seek the truth together.

That is the liberation we are proclaiming.

There are still some people who maintain the myth of the disjunction between civil and political rights, on the one hand, and the capacity of society to build social justice and achieve development, on the other. They are not exclusive. The lack of political and civil rights in Cuba has had serious consequences such as inequality, poverty for the majority, privileges for a minority, the deterioration of certain services, even when they are intended to be human and positive services. Therefore, although many Cubans have worked for years with love and good faith, today there is a serious situation in terms of civil and political rights, as well as increasing inequality and a deterioration of quality of life for the majority. Furthermore, the hands of the citizens are tied, neutralising the Cubans' enormous potential for creativity and hard work. That is the main cause of our poverty.

This reality cannot be justified by claiming that the Cuban people freely chose this system. The honourable Members know that none of the peoples represented in this Parliament, nor any people in the world, would ever surrender the exercise of their fundamental rights.

It is made ever clearer that social and economic well-being and progress are the fruit of the exercise of rights. In the same way, a democracy is not a true or complete one unless it is able to begin and sustain a process of increasing the quality of life of everyone. Because no peoples exercise their right to vote freely in order to choose poverty and inequality, which reduce the masses to a situation of disadvantage and marginalisation. Our Latin American peoples are calling for a real democracy, which is one within which justice can be built. It is scandalous that, in the name of efficiency, methods are applied which are intended to overcome crisis and end poverty, but which in practice threaten to annihilate the poor.

It is not my intention to proclaim new positions or models, but our people have experienced and suffered various political and economic systems. We know today that any method or model which, in a supposed quest for justice, development or efficiency, places itself above human beings and cancels out any of their fundamental rights leads to some form of oppression, of exclusion and brings disaster to the people. We wish to express here our solidarity with all people suffering any kind of oppression or injustice, or who are silenced or marginalized throughout the world.

The cause of human rights is a single one, just as we have one single humanity. While we talk today about globalisation, we declare that if we do not globalise solidarity we do not only endanger human rights, but also the right to continue as a human race. Without human solidarity neither will we conserve a clean world in which it remains possible for human beings to live.

It is therefore my humble opinion that, rather than new models, either for societies or for relations between countries, what we need is a new spirit.

This new spirit must be expressed through solidarity, cooperation and justice in relations between countries and will not hinder development. Because if policies and models are conditional upon the fulfilment of people, the construction of justice and democracy, if policies are humanised, then we will overcome the abyss which separates people and we will be a genuine human family.

May our message from Cuba of Peace and Solidarity reach all peoples. All Cubans are accepting this prize with dignity and stating our hope that we can rebuild our society with the love of everybody, as brothers, as children of God. We Cubans are simple folk and we simply wish to live in peace and to move forward with our work, but we are not able and we do not wish to live without freedom.

We place our hopes in the Lord, who was laid in a humble manger, and this is our homage to Him. Thank you and happy Christmas.

(Standing ovation)

Translation by the European Parliament.