

Realities in Cuba

Floor Statement by Sen. Robert Menendez delivered on March 2, 2009

February 16th of this year marked fifty years since the revolution in Cuba that brought Fidel Castro and his brother Raul to power. Some have used this anniversary as an opportunity to put forth some romantic views of the revolution, so I've come to the floor today to talk about the realities of the situation in Cuba. The reality is, this golden anniversary for the Castros is an impoverished anniversary for the rest of the country.

Over the course of fifty years, the tides of romanticism have come and gone, but they've always crashed hard against the rocks of reality. All the pictures of Che Guevara on t-shirts can't hide the brutality of the declaration he made before the United Nations in 1964:

“hemos fusilado, fusilamos y seguiremos fusilando mientras sea necesario”—“we have executed people, we execute people now and we will continue executing people for as long as we deem necessary.”

No words better sum up the true character of the revolution. The Cuban regime has bent and gilded the spirit of their people over a rotten core of brutality, deprivation and fear.

Here are the realities of the last five decades on the island:

According to the Free Society Project of the Cuba Archive, which has verification for every case, the number of people the regime has murdered or abducted numbers in the thousands, if not the tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands of children have been separated from their parents.

Millions of men, women and young people have been forced into the fields to cut sugar cane and perform other hard labor against their will.

Here are the realities of Cuba today:

The government is, pure and simple, a brutal dictatorship. Every now and then the regime stages meaningless elections, with 609 candidates, all chosen by the regime, vying for 609 seats, in a National Assembly that does nothing without the approval of the Castro brothers.

Despite fertile soil and perfect climate, as well as significant financial assistance, access to food is tightly rationed. The average Cuban worker lives on an income of less than a dollar a day.

World Bank statistics show that fewer people have telephones, televisions, computers and cars than in almost any other country in Latin America. The regime makes sure as few

people as possible can use the Internet—so the percentage of people who have access is less than in Haiti.

The regime's claims about great progress in health care and education are immediately undermined by the costs paid—in lives lost, economic opportunities stolen and freedoms denied. The island was not rich in 1959, yet Cubans have fewer opportunities to get ahead than they did 50 years ago.

Across a wide variety of indicators of human development, Cuba has watched other countries in Latin America make similar or even greater gains.

This poverty has an enormous cost. The widespread desperation of families has forced far too many young girls and boys into becoming sex workers, even though defenders of the Revolution constantly cite the elimination of prostitution as one of its supposed accomplishments. In fact, a few years ago Cuba was listed by *Voyeur Magazine* as the sex tourism hotspot of the world. So much for the success of the regime at eliminating prostitution.

The Castro revolution has been most adept not at spreading education and prosperity, but at instilling penetrating fear and terror, perpetuating their own power through a Stalinist police state.

The Cuban security forces were trained in torture by the dreaded Stasi of East Germany, and carry on that legacy today. If you doubt it, ask Sen. McCain about one of his torturers in Vietnam—a Cuban agent.

The world has expressed outrage at the treatment of detainees in the prison at Guantánamo Bay, and President Obama announced he would close it within a year.

When the news of that decision reached Juan Carlos Herrera Acosta, who has spent more than 6 years in jail for his political views, he said, “¿Cuándo el mundo abrirá sus ojos y dirá que hay que cerrar los otros guantánamos que existen en Cuba?” When will the world open its eyes and say that it's time to close the other Guantánamos in Cuba?"

There is no excuse for turning a blind eye to the 300 other prisons on the island, prisons that make Guantanamo Bay look tame by comparison.

Armando Valladeres, who wrote the prize-winning book *Against All Hope*, was imprisoned in the infamous Isla de Pinos in 1960 for his opposition to communism. He lived through the hell of Castro's jail, suffering violence, forced labor and solitary confinement.

His writings were smuggled out, read throughout the world, and he was finally released after intense international pressure, twenty-two years after he was taken prisoner. Here are some of his memories of his captivity:

“I recalled the two sergeants, Porfirio and Matanzas, plunging their bayonets into Ernesto Diaz Madruga’s body....Boitel, denied water, after more than fifty days on a hunger strike, because Castro wanted him dead; Clara, Boitel’s poor mother, beaten by Lieutenant Abad in a Political Police station just because she wanted to find out where her son was buried.... Officers...threatened family members if they cried at a funeral.

“I remember Estebita and Piri dying in blackout cells, the victims of biological experimentation...So many others murdered in the forced-labor fields, quarries and camps. A legion of specters, naked, crippled, hobbling and crawling through my mind, and the hundreds of men mutilated in the horrifying searches.

Eduardo Capote’s fingers chopped off by a machete. Concentration camps, tortures, women beaten...

“And in the midst of that apocalyptic vision of the most dreadful and horrifying moments in my life, in the midst of the gray, ashy dust and the orgy of beatings and blood, prisoners beaten to the ground, a man emerged, the skeletal figure of a man wasted by hunger with white hair, blazing blue eyes, and a heart overflowing with love, raising his arms to the invisible heaven and pleading for mercy for his executioners.

“‘Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.’ And a burst of machine-gun fire ripping open his chest.”

This has been going on since 1959 but unfortunately it is not a thing of the past.

In 2003, armed security forces raided 22 libraries and sent 14 librarians to jail with terms of up to 26 years.

That year it rounded up 75 journalists, human rights activists and opposition leaders, gave them summary trials and sent them to jail for up to 28 years.

In 2003, Fidel Castro ordered one of the most sweeping, brutal crackdowns on opposition figures in years—a roundup of 75 dissidents and their summary trial.

In that Black Spring, his agents took away Marta Beatriz Roque. She’s an economist, and leader of a group called the Assembly for Promoting Civil Society, a coalition of non-governmental organizations dedicated to peaceful democratic change on the island. In 2003, she was sentenced to 20 years behind bars, for the crime of wanting peaceful change, for the crime of speaking her mind.

In prison, her diabetes and blood pressure made her so ill that the regime let her leave her tiny cell—but they didn’t let her go far. Two years later, the government sent a mob to attack her as she was traveling to meet with a U.S. diplomat.

They beat her, and when she tried to leave to get medical care they trapped her in her home. She was 60 years old. Now, every day of her life, she knows she could wake up

and be thrown in a cell once more, left to die for the crime of thinking independent thoughts, for the crime of asking for change.

During crackdown in the spring of 2003, Fidel Castro also arrested Dr. Oscar Elias Biscet. Dr. Biscet founded the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights, one of the first independent civic groups in Havana.

On February 27, 1999 he was arrested for hanging the national flag sideways at a press conference and was sentenced to three years in jail. He was protesting the forced abortions he was ordered to perform. After his release, he organized seminars on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Cubans. And he was arrested again in December of 2002 for organizing these seminars.

In April of 2003 he was sentenced to 25 years in jail and sent to a special state prison. His dark, damp cell is barely bigger than he is. In 2007, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor in this country. But he still has not won something far more important: his own freedom.

It is a myth that detentions of activists has dropped off since Raul Castro took power: more than 1,500 were rounded up last year, according to the Cuba Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, an independent observer group. They may be released temporarily, but they are always subject to re-arrest.

Multiple independent human rights organizations confirm that the Cuban regime is still holding more than 200 political prisoners—independent journalists, economists, human rights workers and doctors, all jailed for speaking their minds.

In the United States, we saw an election last year that was all about a powerful call for change. The year before, 70 Cuban dissidents were detained and harassed, for simply walking down a street in Havana, wearing a white wristband on their arm that said one word: CAMBIO. Change.

While in the United States, the mantra of change can get you elected, in Cuba, the mere suggestion of change can get you arrested.

The dictatorship maintains a network of spies on every single block—it's called "El Comite por la Defensa de la Revolución," a block-watch organization in every city, every village, every hamlet. If they suspect you, first you'll find yourself quietly demoted at work. Then you'll lose your job. You'll wake up one morning and your house will be covered in graffiti calling your family worms.

You'll walk outside and your former friends will now spit in your path.

The case of Adolfo Fernández Sainz could hardly be more representative: he is a journalist, forced to spend 15 years of his life behind bars, in part for the crime of owning George Orwell's 1984.

But the saddest proof that a country is operated like a prison is when people are shot trying to escape. It was a hallmark of Soviet Russia and East Germany, communist Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Today, the Caribbean is the Cubans' Berlin Wall. All boats and building materials belong to the state, so taking a ship into international waters or even building a raft can be considered crimes, often punishable by death.

Cuban planes have attacked ships from the air, the Cuban Navy has attacked ships from the sea, surrounding boats, sinking them, sending men, women and children to the bottom of the ocean.

The Cuba Archive has documented almost 250 cases of assassinations as people fled, in addition to the countless thousands who have died at sea, either drowning or being killed by sharks.

Cubans know the risks, and they continue to seek freedom. Since 2005, the Washington Post cites the number who've fled to America at 80,000—some of the country's best and brightest, risking arrest and death, leaving under the cover of darkness. Since 1959, according to the Center for the Study of International Migrations, nearly 1.7 million people have been forced into exile.

And for those who cannot leave, there is another sign of despair on the island: World Health Organization data reveal a sad fact, that Cuba has one of the highest suicide rates in the Hemisphere.

Over five decades, we have seen democracy take hold in every country in the Western Hemisphere but one—one island, suspended in the past, resisting the tide of history, its people waiting for something to change.

In 1962, the United States restricted commerce with and travel to Cuba. It stands as a legal, political and moral statement that we reject dictatorship's abuses, and it serves as a way to weaken the regime.

At the beginning it was an embargo in name only. U.S. foreign subsidiaries were allowed commerce with Cuba, and it wasn't until the mid-1980s that these loopholes were closed. The Cuba Democracy Act and later the Libertad Act caused the Castro regime to downsize what had become the 3rd largest military per capita in the Western Hemisphere.

That was good for the Cuban people—good for the hemisphere because Castro could no longer send his troops to promote revolution and destabilize Latin American countries.

That came about not out of ideological change—but out of economic necessity.

The U.S. dollar, the most hated symbol of the revolution, previously illegal to own, is now eagerly sought by the regime, creating a divide in Cuba.

It is a divide between those who have access to U.S. dollars from their families and can use them at State-run dollar stores, with prices that gouge those Cubans—and millions who have no family to send them dollars, and chafe at that disparity. They question a regime that doesn't allow the freedom to work at jobs like tourism, that might give them access to those dollars.

These circumstances did not come about because of a change in Castro's ideology. They came about because of economic necessity.

Economic necessity, not ideological change, further drove the regime to accept international investment, specifically in tourism and mining, something previously illegal. This has created resentment by Cubans who are sent to work at these establishments by the State Employment Agency, where their labor is paid in dollars to the State, with the workers getting worthless *pesos*, a fraction of what the State is paid for their labor.

In addition, foreign companies summarily fire workers without recourse, and get new workers from the State Employment Agency—no questions asked.

Cubans have been denied access to visit hotels in their own country, and are now told they can do so if they can pay hundreds of dollars a night, when they make less than a dollar a day.

Notwithstanding these economic challenges that have created pressure for change in Cuba, opponents of the embargo are quick to point out that it has been in place for many years and the Castros remain in power.

They seem very confident that allowing more American money to flow into Cuba will magically topple the regime. The truth is, their prediction about cause and effect runs completely contrary to what's actually happened there. Over the years, millions of Europeans, Canadians, Mexicans, South and Central Americans have visited Cuba, invested in Cuba, spent billions of dollars, signed trade agreements and engaged politically.

What has been the result? The regime has not opened up—in fact, it has only become more oppressive. Foreign funds often temporarily reach the hands of Cuban families, but they're then forced to spend those dollars in government-run dollar stores, so the money ultimately winds up in the hands of the Cuban government, and many suspect, in the secret bank accounts of the Communist Party elite.

So allowing Americans to sit on a beach that Cubans cannot visit unless they work there, smoking a Cuban cigar for which a worker gets slave wages, sipping a Cuba libre, which is an oxymoron, will not bring the Cuban people their liberty.

And when the government isn't manipulating international aid, it sometimes rejects it altogether, as it did during last year's hurricane season, further punishing its people.

And so I ask, to those who argue that lifting the economic embargo on Cuba means the demise of the Castro regime: Why then has lifting the embargo been the number 1 foreign policy objective of the Castro regime? Does it seek its own demise? Certainly not. What it seeks is the economic viability to continue to perpetuate itself.

But beyond the practical realities, there's a broader principle at stake. Now, as power has passed somewhat from Fidel to Raul, from one dictator to another, are we to declare that their tyranny outlasted our will to resist it? When murderers escape the police and become fugitives, do we declare them innocent after a few years, just because we haven't caught them?

Should we suddenly say, it's too much for the Cuban people to be able to decide for themselves what course their nation will take? Should we decide to suddenly legitimize the behavior of the regime and strengthen its ability to continue perpetrating crimes?

Which one of the freedoms we seek for the Cuban people as a condition of our own full engagement are we willing to deny them? Free speech, free association, freedom of religion, freedom to politically organize and elect their own leadership? Which one of those freedoms that we are willing to say the Cuban people cannot enjoy are we willing to give up?

I have also heard the suggestion from opponents of legal restrictions on Cuba that the United States has dealt with other brutal dictatorships more openly than this one.

Those who make that argument must have a strange definition of a successful policy. If we consider prison camps and child labor, forced abortions and slavery, violent suppression of protests, Tiananmen Square, ethnic cleansing of Tibet and denial of human rights, be it in China, or anywhere around the world, anywhere these violations are happening—if we are willing to accept that as successful engagement, we are very deeply mistaken.

The disregard of human rights violations for the sake of economic gain in the past is never an argument to do so again in the future.

M. President,

A full and open discussion of the real situation in Cuba is timely for more reasons than the 50th anniversary of Castro's revolution. It's timely because, in this Omnibus appropriations bill we have before us, some have attempted to sneak in changes to our current policies.

But perhaps the greatest irony of all is that this bill includes 3 important foreign policy changes with respect to Cuba that have not been subjected to debate in this body.

They have not been questioned for their impact on our national security - they have not gone through the Foreign Relations Committee, they have not been subjected to a vote on the floor of either the House of Representatives or the United States Senate.

These modifications deserve a full examination. They should be subjected to vigorous debate. We should gather evidence, bring a wide range of voices to the table, and make careful and thoughtful considerations of their implications.

But this isn't what's taken place. Instead, this body is being asked to swallow these changes in the crudest process I can imagine -without analysis, without inclusion, and without debate.

Supporters of these modifications claim to be carrying them out in the hopes of fostering democratic change in Cuba, even as they do so in a way that silences democratic debate in our country. The United States cannot claim to be a model for democratic process and inclusive change if we find ourselves resorting to such undemocratic means.

Jamming these foreign policy changes in an omnibus appropriations package, by a handful of members, at the exclusion of the rest of this body, not to mention the rest of the other body, and not to mention the Executive Branch - whose jurisdiction these changes fall within—is simply not democratic.

These changes come in the same week the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's Ranking Member, my distinguished colleague from Indiana Senator Lugar, produced a staff trip report. The memo suggests some of the very changes proposed in the Omnibus.

Instead of a responsible "report," this document presents a loose set of recommendations based a few days' observations on the island, by a single source, without mention of a single conversation with one human rights activist, one political dissident, one independent journalist.

Now I ask you M. President, does it even make any sense that we would see as a basis for a report a few observations, followed by sweeping and untested recommendations about how we should engage with the last totalitarian dictatorship in the Western Hemisphere? M. President, let me just point out a few of the main contradictions in the report:

First of all, the lack of focus on democracy and human rights in the memo was astonishing. In a literal, legal sense, support for Cuba's pro-democracy movement is at the core of U.S. policy towards Cuba. It is represented by the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996. The report doesn't mention the centrality of representative democracy in U.S. policy towards Cuba and the entire hemisphere.

By the same token, the staff memo does not mention that the United States is the world's largest provider of humanitarian aid to the people of Cuba. This fact makes it indisputably clear: the focus of U.S. policy is the Cuban people—advocating for their freedom and empowering them to bring change.

The way the memo addresses the economic situation on the island is no less of an enormous flaw.

On the one hand, the memo claims that economic sanctions have been ineffective, but on the other hand, it says, quote, **that "popular dissatisfaction with Cuba's economic situation is the regime's vulnerability."** That's a contradiction in itself. But it would be even more of a contradiction for the U.S. to do anything to rescue the regime by improving its economic fortunes, thereby neutralizing its vulnerability.

And yet that's exactly what one of the recommendations in the staff memo that's included in the Omnibus would do. That suggested policy change would give the Cuban regime financial credit to purchase agricultural products from the U.S. On its face, this seems like a concession to American farmers. And we certainly want to see farmers sell all over the world. But let's think about this for a moment.

Anyone applying for even a small loan in this country has to undergo serious financial scrutiny, and if their credit record is poor, they would be rejected for that loan.

Well, Cuba's credit history is horrible. The Paris Club of creditor nations recently announced that Cuba has failed to pay almost \$30 billion in debt (not related to official development assistance). Among poor nations, that's the worst credit record in the world. So I ask: if the Cuban government has put off paying those who it already owes \$30 billion, why does anyone think it would meet new financial obligations to American farmers?

Considering the serious economic crisis we're facing right now, we need to focus on solutions for hard-working Americans, not subsidies for a brutal dictatorship.

We should evaluate how to encourage the regime to allow a legitimate opening – not in terms of cell phones and hotel rooms that Cubans can't afford, but in terms of the right to organize, the right to think and speak what they believe.

However, what we are doing with this Omnibus bill, M. President, is far from evaluation, and the process by which these changes have been forced upon this body is so deeply offensive to me, and so deeply undemocratic, that it puts the Omnibus appropriations package in jeopardy, in spite of all the other tremendously important funding that this bill would provide.

The real reason why so many, whose work is often subsidized by business interests, advocate Cuba policy changes is about money and commerce, not about freedom and democracy.

It makes me wonder why those who spend hours and hours in Havana, listening to Fidel Castro's soliloquies, cannot find minutes for human rights and democracy activists.

It makes me wonder why those who go and enjoy the sun of Cuba, will not shine the light of freedom on its jails full of political prisoners.

They advocate for labor rights in the U.S. but are willing to accept forced labor in Cuba. They talk about democracy in Burma, but are willing to sip rum with Cuba's dictators.

M. President,

There's another report that came out last week, a report that I hope this body does not vote on the Omnibus without reading. It's the State Department's 2008 Human Rights Report.

I want to read from it at length, in case my colleagues do not have the opportunity. It says, referring to Cuba's human rights situation, and I quote:

"The government continued to deny its citizens their basic human rights and committed numerous, serious abuses. The government denied citizens the right to change their government...As many as 5,000 citizens served sentences for "dangerousness," without being charged with any specific crime. The following human rights problems were reported: beatings and abuse of detainees and prisoners, including human rights activists, carried out with impunity; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, including denial of medical care; harassment, beatings, and threats against political opponents by government-recruited mobs, police, and State Security officials; arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights advocates and members of independent professional organizations; denial of fair trial; and interference with privacy, including pervasive monitoring of private communications.

"There were also severe limitations on freedom of speech and press; denial of peaceful assembly and association; restrictions on freedom of movement, including selective denial of exit permits to citizens and the forcible removal of persons from Havana to their hometowns; restrictions on freedom of religion; and refusal to recognize domestic human rights groups or permit them to function legally. Discrimination against persons of African descent, domestic violence, underage prostitution, trafficking in persons, and severe restrictions on worker rights, including the right to form independent unions, were also problems."

President Obama often repeats what Martin Luther King understood: that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

The people of Cuba have never given up on their legitimate aspirations for democracy and economic freedom, and now is not the time to give up on them. Just because we can't do everything, doesn't mean we shouldn't do everything we can.

A new American president does mean an opportunity for change. President Obama, who saw repression in Indonesia when he was a child, promised us this: He said, quote, "My policy toward Cuba will be guided by one word: Libertad. And the road to freedom for all Cubans must begin with justice for Cuba's political prisoners, the rights of free speech, a free press and freedom of assembly; and it must lead to elections that are free and fair."

So here's what we can do to help that happen.

Much has been written about seeking a change in our policy.

Let me offer some changes as well, as someone who has followed this his whole life.

In exchange for more liberal remittances to Cuban families, let us insist that the Cuban regime not charge 20% of every dollar sent to Cuba.

Let us also allow remittances, via license, to human rights activists, democracy activists and other civil society advocates.

In exchange for cooperation with Cuba on narcotics trafficking, let them hand over the 200 fugitives the FBI knows are in Cuba, including JoAnne Chesimard the convicted killer of New Jersey State Trooper Werner Foerster {VERN-er FOR-ster).

In exchange for more frequent visits from Cuban-American families that bring money and resources to the island, let us insist that the Cuban regime permit those who want to travel to Cuba and visit human rights activists, democracy activists, independent journalists, and other civil society advocates, be given visas as well.

Today Members of Congress and others, who wish to do so, are routinely denied entrance into Cuba. They are happy to accept those who bring dollars, but not those who speak truth to power.

Let's have the U.S. offer more visitor and student visas for eligible Cubans to come to the U.S., to see and live our way of life. Having Americans travel to Cuba could never be as powerful as having Cuban youth see the greatness of our country, and its pluralistic, diverse, representative democracy. That taste of freedom would be infectious.

In return we simply seek a commitment from Cuba to accept their citizens' return, and to guarantee the issuance of exit permits for all qualified migrants.

Cuba is one of the few countries in the world that will not permit its citizens to travel even when they have a legitimate visa to do so. And, when they give them license to leave, they must pay to do so.

If we want to facilitate the sales of food to Cuba, let us insist that they be sold in open markets, available to all Cubans, without it being part of Castro's food rationing plan, a plan meant to further control the Cuban people.

For those who disagree with our policies toward Cuba—let them ask themselves,

What are they doing to promote democracy, human rights and civil society in Cuba?

What are they doing to support Antúnez, Oswaldo Payá, Marta Beatriz Roque and Oscar Elías Biscet? What are they doing to cast an international spotlight on Cuba's valiant human rights activists, Cuba's equivalents of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn [SOHL-SEN-ITS-EN], Vaclav Havel or Lech Walesa?

Do they sit back as they languish in jail or are harassed, or do they invite them to their embassies in Cuba, to speak in their countries about their struggles for freedom, and do they raise the issue of human rights in Cuba with the Castro regime?

In pursuing any proposal or policy change, we have to recognize, as President Obama made clear to repressive regimes throughout the world in his Inaugural Address, that we will extend a hand if they are willing to unclench their fist. However, if the Omnibus bill is signed by the President as is, he will be extending a hand while the Castro regime maintains its iron-handed clenched fist.

During his presidential campaign, then-Senator Obama promised this. He said, quote, "I will maintain the embargo. It provides us with the leverage to present the regime with a clear choice: if you take significant steps toward democracy, beginning with the freeing of all political prisoners, we will take steps to begin normalizing relations.

That's the way to bring about real change in Cuba – through strong, smart and principled diplomacy." End quote. That was the policy that Americans understood he would pursue when we voted for him.

I believed then that Candidate Obama meant what he said, and I believe now he intends to remain true to his word.

Following our conscience and following our laws, we simply cannot let up our pressure on the regime without seeing symbols of progress.

M. President,

The United States and the international community must continue to work diligently to help bring freedom to Cuba. But we cannot forget how many valiant efforts have come within Cuba itself, how decades of fear and repression have also led to acts of courage. I stand here today in solidarity with all of the brave Cubans who have sacrificed and shown remarkable courage so that one day the Cuban people will finally know the basic liberties they're entitled to as human beings.

Just days ago, 130 Cubans kept vigil outside the Placetas hospital, waiting for news about the condition of a young activist, Iris Tamara Pérez Aguilera, who'd gone into hypoglycemic [high-po-gly-SEE-mick] shock after a hunger strike to protest the regime.

She has been joined in her hunger strike by her husband Jorge Luis Garcia Perez "Antunez," along with Segundo Rey Cabrera and Diosiris Santana Perez. They have vowed to continue their protest until the torture of political prisoner Mario Alberto Perez Aguilera, held at the Santa Clara Provincial Prison, ceases immediately. They will continue their protest until he is taken out of a tiny solitary confinement cell, until he is no longer beaten and forced to starve, until the regime allows Antunez' sister Caridad Garcia Perez to rebuild her home destroyed by the hurricanes last year, which they have not allowed as further punishment to these activists.

When Iris emerged from the hospital the other day, the Cuban citizens waiting outside surrounded her to express their thanks and support.

They hope she'll keep up her work with an organization named for an American pioneer they deeply admire: it's called *el Movimiento Feminista de Derechos Civiles Rosa Parks*, the Rosa Parks Woman's Civil Rights Movement.

The hundreds of political prisoners and all Cubans who live with the daily chains of political repression have shown their commitment that Cuba will change. And this change will come from within, from the Cuban people. But they need our help. We must continue to fight here to do what we can to empower them. And we must continue to acknowledge them when they empower themselves.

M. President,

President Obama has quoted the great Cuban patriot Jose Marti, who once wrote, "It is not enough to come to the defense of freedom with epic and intermittent efforts when it is threatened at moments that appear critical. Every moment is critical for the defense of freedom."

This year, 50 years later, Cuba is still in a cold winter of poverty and oppression. But I hold out hope that people all around the world, and most importantly, within Cuba itself, will use this remarkable moment, and every moment, to bring about a new birth of

freedom, to rise up in a groundswell that will thaw the frost of tyranny and bring about a spring of hope and change—change the Cuban people can believe in—the change they are praying for.