

Global Economic Apartheid

Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Council of State and Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, during the closing session of the South Summit, at the International Conference Center, Havana, Cuba, April 14, 2000

Excellencies;

Distinguished delegates and guests;

Perhaps after the generous resolution you have just adopted regarding the United States' economic war against Cuba, without our having requested it, it would be better to say: dear brothers and sisters.

I have been truly impressed by the speeches we have heard here today. Over the course of many hours, I took note of the main ideas expressed by every Head of State or Government, vice presidents and other high officials who took the floor.

I have attended many summit meetings, but never before had I seen such a coincidence of opinion among the Third World leaders. This shows two things:

Firstly: talent, clear thinking, the ability to elaborate and communicate ideas, and the experience accumulated by the leaders of our countries throughout 40 years, since the inception of the Non-Aligned Movement and later the Group of 77, as many of the peoples represented here achieved independence and we supported each other as free states or as liberation movements.

Secondly: the severity of the crises facing our countries in their efforts to achieve development, and the growing inequality and discrimination they suffer.

The participants here have denounced, one by one, the injustices and calamities that plague our nations and are a constant source of concern to us all.

Every single speaker alluded to the debt tragedy that limits our resources for economic and social development in a thousand different ways.

There was practically unanimous agreement on the view that the benefits of globalization extend to only 20% of the world's population, at the expense of the other 80%, while the gap between the wealthy countries and the marginalized world grows increasingly wider.

There was also a unanimous approach to the need for a transformation of both the United Nations and the international financial system.

One way or another, every delegation expressed the view that unequal and unfair trade is decimating the Third World's export revenues through tariff and non-tariff barriers that deprive it of the minimum amount required to pay off debts and achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Equally unanimous was the complaint that scientific and technical development, currently monopolized by the privileged club of wealthy countries, remains beyond our reach, for it is the wealthy countries that control the research centers, hold almost 100% of patents, and increasingly hinder our access to know-how and technology. Quite a few leaders of the South took it upon themselves to remind us of something that is barely mentioned in the manuals on neoliberal policies and economics: the shameless theft of the most highly qualified minds of the Third World. The North countries are appropriating them because the South cannot offer enough research centers, and much less the high salaries that draw these minds to the consumer societies, which did not spend a penny on training them. In addition, many of the outstanding youths from the Third World studying at

universities in the former colonial powers or other wealthy countries do not return home after graduation.

Many of our world leaders used really overwhelming figures and statistics to reflect the sum total of accumulated financial obligations and the brutal mockery at dozens of the poorest countries of which only four have been targeted for a slight relief. There is a clearly resounding clamor for the Third World's debt to be considerably reduced if it cannot be completely cancelled, which is what would be most fair and equitable for the peoples who have paid it off many times over in the course of centuries past and present.

Many of our colleagues have addressed the need to establish fiscal obligations on various activities in order to finance development.

Cuba has sustained, and steadfastly insists, that a 1% tax on all speculative operations would suffice to finance the development of the Third World. Pay no attention to those who claim that it would be impossible. The technical resources and know-how currently available would make it perfectly possible.

When one hears the participants at this Summit describe the billions of people who receive less than two dollars, less than one dollar or only a few cents with which to survive, one might come to believe that our planet is devoid of even the slightest sense of humanity. Nobody could have imagined that after the century of the revolution for liberty, equality and fraternity over 200 years ago, the century of accelerated industrialization that followed or that of great breakthroughs in communications, science and the productivity of human labor, which has just come to an end, we would be discussing the hundreds of millions of people who are going hungry, malnourished, illiterate, unemployed and suffering from disease, in addition to the colossal numbers of children who are undersized or underweight for their age, who have no access to schools or medical care, or who are forced to work at grueling and low-paying jobs, not to mention infant mortality rates that are

sometimes over 20 times higher than in the wealthy nations. These are the permanent human rights reserved to us.

Fixed in our memories, as a symbol of our era, is the figure of 36 million people in the world infected with AIDS, of which 26 million live in the African continent, as indicated by the Secretary General of the United Nations; medical treatment for them would require 10,000 US dollars per person per year. And, in the next twelve months, another six million newly infected people will engross this figure.

Why do all of these happen? How much longer will it last?

One way or another, practically everyone here expressed their expectations about this Summit.

Never before had I seen such awareness. Let us hope that we are as aware of our combined strength as we are of the pettiness and the injustices we suffer.

Perhaps in the future people will speak in terms of before and after the first South Summit. It is up to us to make it happen.

People used to talk about apartheid in Africa. Today, we can talk about apartheid throughout the world where more than four billion people are deprived of the most basic rights of human beings: the right to life, to health, to education, to clean water, to food, to housing, to employment, to hope for their future and that of their children.

At the rate we are going, we will soon be deprived even of the air we breathe, increasingly poisoned by the wasteful consumer societies that pollute the elements essential for life and destroy human habitat. Natural disasters like those that have affected Central America, Venezuela, Mozambique and many other countries -- almost all of them in the Third World and all in the course of barely 18 months--

were completely unprecedented in the 20th century. They took the lives of thousands of people. These are the consequences of climatic changes and the destruction of nature and the blame cannot be laid upon those of us gathered here to fight not only for universal standards of justice but also for the preservation of life on the planet.

The wealthy world pretends to ignore that slavery, colonialism and the brutal exploitation and plunder to which our countries were subjected for centuries are the causes of underdevelopment and poverty. They look upon us as inferior nations. They attribute the poverty we suffer to the inability of African, Asian, Caribbean and Latin American peoples, that is, of dark and yellow skinned, indigenous and mixed-race peoples to achieve any degree of development or even to govern ourselves. They speak of our flaws as if it were not they themselves who impregnated our pure and noble ancestral peoples with the vices of the colonizers or the exploiters.

They also pretend to ignore that when Europe was populated by those whom the Roman Empire called barbarians, there were civilizations in China, India, the Far East, the Middle East, and north and central Africa that had created what are still known today as World Wonders and that had developed written languages before the Greeks learned to read and Homer wrote *The Iliad*. In our own hemisphere, the Mayans and pre-Incan civilizations had attained knowledge that still today continues to astound the world.

I am firmly convinced that the current economic order imposed by the wealthy countries is not only cruel, unjust, inhuman and contrary to the inevitable course of history but also inherently racist. It reflects racist conceptions like those that once inspired the Nazi holocaust and concentration camps of Europe, mirrored today in the so-called refugee camps of the Third World, which actually serve to concentrate the effects of poverty, hunger and violence. These are the same racist conceptions that inspired the monstrous system of apartheid in Africa.

At this Summit, our reflections were aimed at building unity, accumulating forces, strategies, tactics and the means to coordinate and guide our efforts to ensure that our vital economic rights are recognized. But, this Summit also reflects our obligation to fight for our dignity, our culture and our right to be treated as equals.

In the same way that, in a not-so-distant past, we defeated colonialism and attained the status of independent countries, and much more recently crushed the heinous and fascist apartheid system through the common efforts of the Third World in support of the heroic South African fighters, we can show that we are not inferior to anyone when it comes to fighting capacity, bravery, talent and virtues.

We are fighting for the most sacred rights of the poor countries; but we are also fighting for the salvation of a First World incapable of preserving the existence of the human species, of governing itself in the midst of contradictions and self-serving interests and much less of governing the world whose leadership must be democratically shared. It could almost be mathematically demonstrated that we are fighting to preserve life on Earth.

This is only way that we can prevent the ship of which I spoke in my welcoming address from colliding with the iceberg that could sink us all.

This is only way that we can look forward to life and not death.

Thank you, very much.