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Cuba 2019: «We Have a Unique People!»

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When speaking about the strength and collaboration of Cubans as a result of the energy situation experienced this year, President Miguel Díaz-Canel expressed with admiration «We have a unique people! Thanks, Cuba ». It's an idea he has repeated and at a time of summarizing this 2019 which is about to end, it's worth saying it to each of the 12 months.

Because the year was just beginning and forces and efforts were already at work when on January 27<sup>th</sup> the most powerful tornado ever recorded since 1940 wreak havoc in Havana.

The municipalities 10 de October, Guanabacoa, Regla, San Miguel del Padrón, and Habana del Este were the most affected. The balance was six deaths, nearly 1238 homes partially destroyed, substantial damage to the economy and services.

But another tornado, of solidarity and dedication, united wills to restore the damage in record time.

The capital was just starting to get back on its feet when the entire country, two months after the tornado, suffered the ravages, not of nature, but of an unquenchable hatred: the hostility of the U.S. government and its unsuccessful attempts to destroy what has been achieved in this

island.

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires in Havana, Mara Tekach, announced that from the 18<sup>th</sup> of that month, his country will reduce the validity of the B2 visa from 5 years to three months for Cuban citizens, with only one entry. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba strongly rejects the new escalation, which has not stopped and has marked with particular resentment the existence of Cubans in this 2019.

But with the courage and confidence that characterize this people, and as a result of a constitutional referendum where 86.85% of voters supported a new Magna Carta, on April 10<sup>th</sup> the new Constitution of the Republic of Cuba was proclaimed during the second extraordinary session of the Ninth Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power.

Back then, the Army General Raúl Castro Ruz delivered the proclamation speech, where he highlighted that "The Constitution we proclaim today guarantees the continuity of the Revolution and the determination of our socialism."

With the same principle with which the new Constitution was received, on International Worker's Day millions of Cubans paraded throughout the country, in response to the summoning made during the 21<sup>st</sup> CTC Congress, held on April.

A motivation to increase efficiency and quality at work, while improving the quality of life of many Cubans were the measures approved by the Council of Ministers on June 27<sup>th</sup>.

The purpose of these measures was to promote an economic strategy based on the maximum use of domestic proficiencies and human resources. The measures included a salary increase in the budgeted sector and also the pensions that benefited more than two million 750 thousand Cubans.

Cubans can boast in this 2019 of the resistance to withstand difficulties and attacks, and we must add to the list the unprecedented heat that accompanied this summer. However, Cuban athletes knew how to train under high temperatures and even long before that.

The profits of their effort were tangible on August 12<sup>th</sup> after occupying position fifth in the ranking of medals in the Pan American Games of Lima-2019, where our athletes won 98 medals, 33 of them were gold medals.

Even without traces of high temperatures dissipating, on September 2<sup>nd</sup> began the Academic Year 2019-2020. The national ceremony for that event, which implies in one way or another every Cuban family, took place at the José María Heredia high school, precisely one of the schools damaged by the tornado that hit Havana in January.

On September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, Cubans sat before their TV sets to grasp every last detail of a special Round Table program where the President of Cuba announced measures to face the energy situation that, as the tearing winds of the tornado, marked the everyday life of the country.

Together with the Council of Ministers, Díaz-Canel announced on television the energy situation of the Island and the alternatives to overcome this situation with the participation of the people.

With the same sense of responsibility and commitment he showed when commenting on savings and creativity, the Cuban president had completed his first year in power on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

On October 10<sup>th</sup>, a relevant date for the history of Cuba since 1968, as a result of the new Constitution, Díaz-Canel was elected President of the Republic, and Salvador Valdés Mesa as Vice President. Until that moment, Díaz-Canel also held the presidency of the Councils of State and Ministers.

Only a fortnight had passed since his election as President of the Republic when he was responsible for informing, also at the Special Round Table program of new economic measures.

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup>, these measures were announced, not just with the purpose of enduring the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. government to Cuba, but to develop economy.

A day after the last television appearances, a piece of news shocked deep the people of Cuba: the death of Alicia Alonso.

The greatest exponent of a school and art commitment to Homeland, the Prima Ballerina Assoluta Alicia Alonso died at age 98. Raúl Castro and Díaz-Canel were the last ones to pay their respects on October 20<sup>th</sup> at the Great Theater of Havana, named after the dancer.

From the most progressive spaces of that same world, more than 1,200 people from 96 nations came together in Cuba early in November to participate in the Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Meeting, for Democracy and against Neoliberalism.

From November 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> this important meeting took place in Havana, whose closing ceremony was attended by Raúl Castro, Díaz-Canel and Nicolás Maduro, president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The echoes of so many left-wing voices that rose in the Cuban capital against the U.S. blockade imposed on the Island and in favor of so many fair causes resounded, when on November 7<sup>th</sup> the United Nations approved the draft resolution "Need to Put an End to the

Economic, Commercial and Financial Blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba ».

The Cuban Foreign Minister presented the document to the United Nations General Assembly and was approved with 187 votes in favor; three against and two abstentions.

By then, the country's capital was almost ready for one of the most relevant events of the year, which took place on November 16<sup>th</sup>: The 500th Anniversary of Havana.

Although the event had its climax that day with the Grand Gala 500

Anniversary at the esplanade outside the restored Capitol Building of Havana, celebrations had begun a lot earlier and especially preparations and efforts for the capital of all Cubans, which resulted in several social works and renovations to heritage buildings, including the National Capitol Building.

But as the citizens of this Island have learned long ago and with Fidel to make our own the pains and conflicts that occur abroad, next to the effervescence of the celebrations for the 500 years we still feel together with the Chilean people who protested and was repressed, and also with the Bolivian people, whose president, Evo Morales suffered a coup d'état.

As a result of this event, on November 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, the Cuban collaborators in the Medical Brigade in Bolivia returned to Cuba. In the second group arrived the four who had been arbitrarily detained as part of the violence unleashed in that country.

The following at the international airport Antonio Maceo of Santiago de Cuba, the plane from Quito landed with the last 183 Cuban health workers. This return was the result of the decision of the government of that South American country, not to renew the agreements signed with the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba.

This last month of 2019 became a prominent place on the calendar with the completion, on the 14<sup>th</sup>, of the *XVII Summit of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America-Peoples Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP)*, to commemorate the 15 years of this Alliance, founded by Fidel Castro and Hugo Rafael Chávez.

The main goal of the Summit was to deepen this alliance as an expression of the objectives of regional independence and an example of integration against the growing threats to regional self-determination, sovereignty, peace, and stability.

Raúl and Díaz-Canel presided over the mass act at the steps of Havana University, which served as a climax to the great meeting, which reaffirmed the Alliance as a platform for political coordination in defense of independence, peace and integration, from solidarity and cooperation.

As a result of the very same imperial hostility often denounced at the ALBA-TCP Summit, on December 15<sup>th</sup> the general director for the United States of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, Carlos Fernández de Cossío, warned of an aggravation of tensions between that country and Cuba for the violence of the people in charge of the North American foreign policy.

The Cuban diplomat meant that those running the policy of the United States to the western hemisphere are people with very extreme and aggressive behaviors towards the island, whose intention is to cause the breaking of all ties and the closure of the embassies of Havana and Washington. He clarified that the Cuban authorities do not want such an eventuality, but they are ready for it despite their willingness to build a respectful and civilized relationship with the United States.

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