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Hundreds stand tall in solidarity with the people of Latin America at Havana Conference

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Closing of the Anti-imperialist Conference in Havana, Cuba. Photo: Bill Hackwell

From Nov. 1-3 more than 1,350 delegates from 86 countries representing 789 organizations, came to Havana to participate in the Anti-imperialist Conference of Solidarity, for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism. Delegates traveled from all continents, particularly from Latin America and the Caribbean. The conference was organized by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (CTC), along with the Cuban Chapter of Social Movements and the Continental Conference for Democracy and against Neoliberalism.

This historic conference took place at a decisive moment for all progressive forces that resist neoliberal policies as it becomes increasingly clear on the intention on the

part of the United States to reconquer Latin America and take over all its natural resources aided by servile oppressive governments and local oligarchs.

José Ramón Machado Ventura, second secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba and Esteban Lazo Hernández, president of the National Assembly of People's Power and the Council of State presided over the opening plenary.

In a moving opening presentation, with songs and verses, the children of Cuba's National Theater group, "La Colmenita" inaugurated the Conference embracing with love and tenderness all of those in attendance. Also present at the conference were renowned intellectuals and writers like Ignacio Ramonet, Atilio Boron, Stella Calloni, Abel Prieto, Omar Gonzalez, and Pedro Calzadilla.

Fernando Gonzalez Llort, President of ICAP and one of the Cuban Five welcomed participants. "We will be able to face the most challenging adversities. Neither with asphyxiation nor with laws will they be able to get a single concession from the Cuban people, who do not surrender and will continue with their principles of solidarity with the world" he said.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla started his speech by saying: "You can feel in this room the deep expression of our peoples and solidarity with Cuba...There will be no sustainable development without the right to the development of the countries of the South, nor can it be without social justice." Bruno also referred to how in the present time lies become habitual, intolerance grows and the imposition of supremacist ideas appears. "The intention is to impose a totalitarian model that destroys cultures."

During the second day of the Conference, a special event about the struggle to free the beloved former President of Brazil, Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva Lula took place with the participation of a large delegation from his homeland, who were presented with boxes of thousands of petitions signed by Cubans demanding Lula's freedom.

Other constant and heartfelt expressions of support of countries in struggle, including the independence of Puerto Rico, echoed in the convention center along with pronouncements in solidarity with the right to self-determination of the peoples of Palestine and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The second-day delegates participated in 6 different commissions. Solidarity with Cuba and other Just Causes took place at the Latin America School of Medicine (ELAM). Other commissions met at the Palace of the Convention, the site of the conference.

At ELAM arriving buses from the conference were greeted by lines of medical students in their white coats. After a welcoming, plenary delegates divided up by region to develop proposals for action against the blockade. The talents of students were on display at the end of the day with music, dance and poetry.

At the same time at the Palace of the Convention rooms filled with people participating in the commissions including 1) The People in the Face of Free Trade and Transnationals, 2) Decolonization and Cultural Warfare. Strategic Communication and Social Struggle, 3) Youth: Strategies and Continuity in Struggles, 4) Democracy, Sovereignty and Anti-imperialism, and 5) Integration, Identities and Common Struggles.

The Decolonization and Cultural Warfare, Strategic Communication and Social Struggle commission was moderated by Pedro Calzadilla, Historian and General Coordinator of the Network in Defense of Humanity, and Omar González, Writer and journalist, and Coordinator of the Cuban chapter of the Network in Defense of Humanity. Among the panelist were Abel Prieto Jiménez, Director of the Martiano Program Office and President of the José Martí Cultural Society and Ignacio Ramonet, Spanish and French, Sociologist, writer and journalist.

The third and last day brought endless emotions as participants heard a declaration of Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and a final declaration of the Anti-Imperialist Conference including proposals for an action plan that includes establishing a

common communication strategy as a weapon of action for the coming months.

Participants were nurtured by three days of positive energy to return to their respective places and continue the struggle for a better world. But the symbolic culmination of the 3 day experience was the presence at the closing ceremony of Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro Moros.

President Maduro spoke first, and brought applauses and loud chanting from delegates when he shouted, "We hear him, we feel him, Fidel is present here!"

He talked with optimism of the future..."with the strong resistance we've had, we can say today, towards the end of 2019, that a new geopolitical situation is developing in the region and a new wave is rising to face neoliberalism."

He talked about the situation in Bolivia saying "Evo Morales is going to resist and triumph over the fascist threat of the Bolivian Right. The Venezuelan President said that the deadline of the opposition was not set just against Evo but against the Bolivian people.

He also talked about the United States Administration and described them and the regional right as being stupid for blaming him and Raul for the events in Brazil, Chile and Ecuador. "No! it is only the IMF that is the one to be blamed, together with its neoliberal recipients. The ones they are blaming are searching for alternatives to face those wild neoliberal policies of hunger and misery."

"If there is anything we learned from Chavez, it was to be brave. I always remember how brave Chavez was when he came to Cuba. He came to Cuba to support Fidel during the worst time of the special period. "More than a few told Chavez; don't go to Cuba or you will lose credibility! They were in the midst of the special period and

Chavez said, "Fidel is the light for the Continent. I'm going!" And here he was 25 years ago. A dose of courage is needed to pave the ways of truth."

"In Venezuela with courage we united the revolutionary processes that began with Bolivar and Marti. And that was followed by the unity between Fidel and Chavez. It's necessary to take those paths of courage and dare to debunk myths, blackmail, and lies."

Maduro finished his talk to a thunderous applause when he said, "Good and better times are rising in Latin America. Let's have enough spiritual strength to continue pushing in our century and then no one will be able to take it from us."

Following President Maduro, Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel spoke. He described the discourse of Trump "as aggressive and dismissive of all those who do not share his approach. The decisions that he makes affect millions on Twitter with the most abhorrent behavior. He talks about socialism without the slightest idea of what it means. And orders the end of any process or political program that intends to overcome prevailing injustice, as if he held the course of history in his hands."

"He is not the first emperor to try this. And surely he will not be the last to fail. Because history can only be changed by the people. Fidel said many times that the lie was the main adversary to defeat in politics and that telling the truth is the first duty of every revolutionary. This is one of our fundamental missions as practitioners of revolutionary politics. The first enemy to cut down is the lie and even more so, the imperialist lie."

He addressed all delegates by saying: "In your beautiful Declaration of Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, you have written: "The peoples of the world need the example of Cuba", and he recalled Marti's statement that maintains its relevance: "Whoever rises today with Cuba rises for all time." Thanks for saying it and doing it! He continued, "You have called today for unity among political forces and the social

and popular movements of the left, to continue to raise consciousness, generate ideas, and organize for the struggle”.

“We see this struggle in the battle for the truth. We must defeat the lies on which wars of all kinds against our peoples are launched: informing, persuading, mobilizing, marching with the poor of the earth, who have grown tired of lies and abuse. Proposing and creating programs that respond to the most pressing demands of workers, students, farmers, intellectuals, and artists.”

“In memory of Fidel and Chávez, two of the greats of Our America, whom we were fortunate to meet, listen to, and follow in the most altruistic practice of solidarity, we look to their work as a guide for the new, challenging times that await us. I believe we all feel that great avenues are opening up, where free men now walk to build a better society. A better world is possible and urgently necessary! Let us fight for it!”

Venezuela and Cuba are at the center of the most vicious attacks and lies by US imperialism and their lackeys, and the significance of having the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution and the current presidents of both countries together on the same stage was not lost on the audience. The powerful speeches of both presidents sent a message of strength to the struggling people of the world and at the same time a message of defiance to the neo liberal policies of the Empire of the North. Despite all the attacks and attempts at economic strangulation that both countries are having to endure, here they were standing strong, without fear, surrounded by cheering allies.

To view more photos from the conference go to:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/16954978@N05/albums/72157711687678386>

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