

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE AND COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, FIDEL CASTRO RUZ, AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE VICTIMS OF THE CUBANA AIRLINES PLANE DESTROYED IN FLIGHT ON OCTOBER 6, GIVEN IN REVOLUTION SQUARE, HAVANA, OCTOBER 15, 1976 [1]

Date:

15/10/1976

Relatives of the Cubans assassinated October 6;

Compatriots:

In sorrow, mourning, indignation, we meet today in this historic square to bid farewell, however symbolically, to the remains of our comrades assassinated in the brutal act of terrorism perpetrated against a civilian plane in flight with 73 persons aboard, 57 of them Cubans. Most of the remains lie in the unfathomable ocean depths, without the tragedy having left the relatives even the consolation of their bodies. It has been possible to retrieve the physical remains of only eight Cubans. They thus become the symbol of all those who died, the sole material remains we will bury in our land of those 57 healthy, vigorous, enthusiastic, selfless, young compatriots. Their average age was barely 30, although their lives had nevertheless already been immensely rich in terms of their contribution to work, studies, sports, to their family and friends and to the Revolution.

When we read each one's biography, we see what a splendid page of service to the country their lives represented. The captain of the plane had been elected National Work Hero this very year. Many had earned the 20th Anniversary Medal. A number of crew members had provided various internationalist services and the athletes had just finished writing a brilliant and insuperable page in sports history by winning all the gold medals in the regional fencing competition that had just been held in Caracas. Many were members of the Communist Youth or the Party, all were outstanding in their activities, each one of them had been a lucid example of how devotion to study, achievement, work and the fulfillment of duty is the essential characteristic in our citizenry today.

They weren't millionaires on a pleasure trip, they weren't tourists with time and money to visit other countries; they were humble workers or students and athletes performing the tasks their country had given them, with modesty and devotion.

Among the passengers were 11 Guyanese youth, six of them selected to study medicine in Cuba —lives lost of men whose destiny was to save lives in their underdeveloped and poor country. Five dedicated citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea also died, representatives of a people who have been victims of United States aggression for so long, who were visiting Latin American countries on a friendship trip.

The plane was destroyed in flight by an explosion a few minutes after it had taken off from the Barbados airport. With indescribable heroism, the brave and expert pilots of the plane made a supreme effort to land, but the burning and almost destroyed craft could only remain aloft a few more minutes. They had enough time and fortitude, however, to explain that there had been an explosion aboard, that the plane

was on fire and they were trying to make a landing. It is unimaginable what an impact the explosion and fire must have had on the passengers and crew enclosed in an airplane at an altitude of approximately 6 000 meters.

Some imperialist news agency immediately mentioned a possible mechanical failure, but everything the pilot transmitted to the Barbados airport was taped. More evidence was immediately added. Two individuals with Venezuelan documents had boarded the plane in Trinidad and left it in Barbados, before the accident; almost immediately after the plane blew up in the air, they boarded a return flight to Trinidad, where they checked into the most luxurious hotel without any luggage at all. At the request of the Barbados authorities, whose suspicions had been aroused, they were arrested.

The investigations begun by the police of both countries immediately produced evidence strongly indicating that they were the physical perpetrators of the sabotage.

Because of the documents they used, the Venezuelan authorities also quickly became apprised of the events and involved in the investigation. On the following day, October 7, in a cable of condolence to Cuba, the president of Venezuela, Carlos Andrés Pérez, described the deed as an abominable crime. Later, the prime minister of Barbados used similar terms publicly when he spoke at United Nations headquarters. The fact that those governments —whose officials had access to the most immediate and important sources of information, the detainees themselves, the circumstances surrounding their behavior and their documents— labeled the act as one of terrorism, was already very significant in itself.

Although from the first information, the government of Cuba had not the slightest doubt about what caused the tragedy, it refrained from making any statement, waiting to analyze carefully the news that was being received as well as the background and reports —some public and others confidential— that were in its hands.

At first, the real identity of the detainees was not precisely known. It was said that perhaps the documents were false. The names Freddy Lugo and José Velázquez were released and it was said that the latter also called himself José García, and that he held more than one passport. Later the press also reported that the Venezuelan consul had talked with the detainees for five hours and that the United States ambassador in Barbados had hurriedly left for Washington. Nevertheless, news surrounding the detainees and other details and circumstances of interest were fairly tightly guarded.

On October 9, the government of Venezuela stated that Freddy Lugo was a Venezuelan citizen and that investigations were proceeding to identify José Velázquez or José García.

On October 10, several absolutely reliable sources in Venezuelan press circles, indignant at the monstrous crime, sent Cuba highly important reports. They revealed that a photographer from the newspaper El Mundo, named Hernán Ricardo, had been seen two weeks earlier with Félix Martínez Suárez, well-known enemy of the Cuban Revolution, and two other individuals. That this Hernán Ricardo was inseparable from Freddy Lugo. That two days after the explosion of a bomb in the Cubana Airlines office in Panama, Hernán Ricardo had arrived at Maiquetía airport on a flight from that country. That they had proof that said person held three passports, one of them in the name of José Velázquez. It was added that, in the very editorial offices of El Mundo newspaper, he had bragged that he knew a Cuban plane would be blown up in Barbados.

But the most essential and important point these well-informed Venezuelan sources communicated to us, is that it was widely known that Hernán Ricardo was a CIA agent, that he often handled reports from the agency and that, earning a relatively modest salary of 1600 bolívars, he had a car that cost 40 000 and an apartment that cost 100 000. Some people had also heard him talking with Freddy Lugo about explosives courses they were receiving. And because of all these antecedents, they suspected that the other person arrested, who claimed to be José Velázquez, was Hernán Ricardo.

Two days later, on October 12, the government of Venezuela officially announced that the second detainee, José Velázquez, was really Hernán Ricardo.

This explained everything.

To the reports from Venezuela we must add that, according to data in our hands, Félix Martínez Suárez is a well-known CIA agent.

News reports from Venezuela speak about fabulous amounts of money given to the physical perpetrators of the deed.

Venezuelan territory was unquestionably used to work out the final phase of the sabotage and citizens of that country were undoubtedly the physical perpetrators of the horrible crime. But this in no way leads us to confuse the issue.

It is true that there is a group of well-known Cuban counter-revolutionaries in Venezuela who have a degree of access to specific political circles, who are implicated in imperialism's terrorist plans against our country and it is very likely that some of them had a hand in the events. But we don't harbor the slightest doubt that the government of Venezuela has absolutely nothing to do with the United States' aggressive plans against Cuba; that its attitude toward our country has been honest; that just as President Carlos Andrés Pérez himself has promised, it will make an exhaustive investigation concerning the involvement of Venezuelan citizens or residents of the country in the repugnant events, and will demand that responsibility for the use of Venezuelan territory as a base for terrorist acts of aggression be placed where it belongs.

The recruitment of citizens and the use of territory of other countries to carry out acts of that nature are methods typical of the CIA.

At the beginning we had doubts as to whether the CIA had directly organized the sabotage or had carefully elaborated it through its cover organizations made up of Cuban counter-revolutionaries; we are now decidedly inclined toward the first theory. The CIA participated directly in the destruction of the Cubana Airlines plane in Barbados.

The most repugnant aspect of this case is the use of mercenaries who, for money, are capable of cutting off in a few seconds the precious lives of 73 defenseless persons, people who had been their fellow passengers in the plane a few minutes earlier.

In recent months, the government of the United States, resentful at Cuba's contribution to the defeat the imperialists and racists suffered in Africa, has unleashed a series of terrorist actions against Cuba, accompanied by brutal threats of aggression. That campaign has been intensified day by day and has been directed chiefly against our diplomatic headquarters and our airlines.

On July 9 of this year, in Kingston, Jamaica, only a few weeks before the plane sabotage in Barbados, a powerful bomb exploded in a cart carrying the luggage to the Cubana Airlines flight leaving for Cuba. The bomb did not explode while the plane was in flight because its arrival had been delayed.

On October 2 of this year, four days before the plane sabotage in Barbados, the counter-revolutionary journalist Llano Montes, who has reason to be well informed about those events, wrote in the Caracas El Mundo that a plastic dynamite bomb had been fastened under the wing of a Cubana Airlines plane in Barbados and had been loosened by a little stream of gasoline when the plane went down the runway to start its flight. He added that an airport security employee found the plastic dynamite on the ground, deactivated it and took it to the office where it disappeared without his superiors being informed of the fact.

Not only have all the Caribbean and Central American states that maintain relations with our country been used in the terrorist acts perpetrated against Cuba —Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela— but also other neighboring states such as the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, where the terrorists live, move and organize, without of course excluding the United States, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua and Chile where they are based and act openly with official support. In expanding these activities, imperialism has shamelessly violated the sovereignty and the laws of many countries in the region.

The perpetrators of these crimes move everywhere with impunity; they have inexhaustible funds; they carry United States passports as naturalized citizens of that country, or real or false documents from other countries, and they use the most sophisticated methods of terror and crime.

Who, if not the CIA, with the sanctuary of established imperialist domination and impunity in this hemisphere, is capable of such deeds?

An important aspect is the Central Intelligence Agency's close association with the tyrannies of Nicaragua and Chile in order to carry out these plans.

While the territories of Nicaragua and Guatemala served as a base for armed aggressions against Cuba even at the time of the mercenary attack on the Bay of Pigs, and later pirate attacks were made from bases in Miami, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, today the same groups of counter-revolutionary types are being used by Somoza and Pinochet as well, according to the specific purposes of each, not only against Cuba but also against Panama, Jamaica, Guyana, the Chilean popular movement and other Latin American progressive movements.

It is a well-known fact that every time the CIA has concocted a plan of action against Cuba, at the time of the Bay of Pigs or later, to perpetrate the interminable chain of pirate attacks, subversive actions and arms deliveries it has organized and directed, it has always, on every occasion, disguised its activities under the cloak of various Cuban counter-revolutionary organizations. It is impossible to recall the number of names and initials this shady Yankee institution has created.

Last June a group of terrorist counter-revolutionary organizations, all of them located inside the United States —the so-called National Liberation Front of Cuba, Cuban Action, Cuban Nationalist Movement, Brigade 2506 and F-14, chiefly composed of individuals who have worked for the CIA for a number of years and have received training from it— met in Costa Rica to create the so-called United Revolutionary Organizations' Command (CORU).

These groups not only act freely and with impunity from United States territory, but through CORU, their main heads are closely linked to CIA activities against Cuba.

The actions are not always carried out by members of these cover groups. Many times the CIA does the dirty work by other means, and the events are then attributed to the organizations that have been created.

In the United States these groups publicly proclaim their crimes and announce new acts of vandalism.

In the month of August, 1976, an alleged war communique was printed in a counter-revolutionary newspaper published in Miami which, after describing how they blew up an automobile in front of the Cuban Embassy in Colombia and destroyed the Air Panama offices, states at the end: "Very soon we will attack airplanes in flight..." and it is signed by the five previously mentioned terrorist organizations located in Miami.

In another Miami newspaper, on September 19 of this year, we read a detailed description by CORU of the attempt to kidnap the Cuban consul in Mérida and the assassination of the fishing technician

Artagnán Díaz Díaz together with the plan to dynamite the Cuban Embassy in Mexico. Two of the assassins had flown from Miami to Mexico with United States passports to do the work, and were arrested in that country following the crime. A third returned to the United States to escape the action of Mexican justice.

In another of the malicious articles published in Miami, on September 9, 1976, there is a picture spread of a so-called congress of the terrorist organization Brigade 2506 held in that city. The same publication includes the photo of the tyrant Somoza making the closing speech and with him, a Yankee congressman, Claude Pepper.

Another publication printed the photo of an assembly of those counter-revolutionary groups presided over, according to the picture caption, by Julio Durán, Chilean ambassador to the United Nations; the Mayor of Miami, Maurice Ferrer; Colonel Eduardo Sepúlveda, Chilean consul general in Miami, and US Congressman Tom Gallagher.

What is strange about the fact that now CORU claims responsibility, through the news agency AP, for the repugnant feat of having dynamited a passenger plane in flight with 73 people aboard?

Why should it be strange for these same groups to have assassinated the former Chilean minister Orlando Letelier, whose death infuriated Latin American and world opinion?

Reviewing the terrorist acts perpetrated against Cuba since the United States government launched its insolent threats against our country, we have the following:

April 6, 1976. Two fishing boats, Ferro 119 and Ferro 123 are attacked by pirate launches proceeding from Florida, causing the death of the fisherman Bienvenido Mauriz and serious damage to the boats.

April 22. A bomb is placed in the Cuban Embassy in Portugal causing the death of two comrades and seriously wounding several others, completely destroying the premises.

July 5. The Cuban Mission to the United Nations is the object of an explosives attack, causing important material damage.

July 9. A bomb explodes in the cart carrying luggage to the Cubana Airlines flight, in the Jamaican airport, moments before boarding time.

July 10. A bomb explodes in the British West Indies Airways office in Barbados, which represents Cubana Airlines' interests in that country.

July 23. A technician from the National Fishing Institute, Artagnán Díaz Díaz, is assassinated in an attempt to kidnap the Cuban consul in Mérida.

August 9. Two officials of the Cubana Embassy in Argentina are kidnapped, and have disappeared without a trace.

August 18. A bomb explodes in the Cubana Airlines office in Panama, causing considerable damage.

October 6. The Cubana Airlines plane is destroyed in flight with 73 persons aboard.

As is evident, in just two months, two extraordinarily serious sabotages were organized against Cuban planes on international flights filled with passengers, one of which was fatal.

Behind these deeds stands the CIA. And almost without exception, on all occasions, the terrorist organizations located inside the United States and acting with impunity in that country's territory, essentially the five that form the so-called CORU, claimed responsibility for them.

I wish to recall that the CIA has been the instigator of criminal methods that have increasingly affected the international community in recent years. The CIA plotted and encouraged skyjacking in order to use it against Cuba during the early years of the Revolution; the CIA plotted pirate attacks from foreign bases in its aggressive policy against Cuba; the CIA plotted the destabilization of foreign governments; the CIA revived for modern times the deplorable policy of plotting and committing assassinations of leaders of other countries; the CIA has now plotted the ominous scheme to blow up civilian airplanes in flight. The world community must be aware of the gravity of these events.

Even after the United States Senate investigated and publicly acknowledged the countless CIA plots to assassinate leaders of the Cuban Revolution and its dedication to that end for a number of years, the United States government has given the Cuban government no explanation of those events nor has it in any way apologized.

We suspect that the United States government has not given up such practices. On October 9, only three days after the criminal sabotage in Barbados, a message sent by the CIA to an agent in Havana was intercepted. That message, transmitted from the CIA's central headquarters in Langley, Virginia, says in part: "Please inform at earliest opportunity any data concerning Fidel's attendance at the ceremony for the first anniversary of Angola's independence, November 11. If he's going, try to get complete itinerary for Fidel's visit to other countries on the same trip."

Another order, dated earlier, says: "What is the official and specific reaction concerning bomb attacks against Cuban offices abroad? What are they going to do to avoid them and prevent them? Whom do they suspect is responsible? Will there be reprisals?"

We hope the United States government does not dare deny the truth of these instructions from the CIA's main office, and many others sent to the same person, in flagrant acts of espionage. We have the code, the ciphers and every proof of authenticity for these messages. In this particular case, the presumed agent recruited by the CIA has kept the Cuban government informed (Applause) from the very beginning and for ten years of all details of every contact he had with it, the equipment and instructions he received. The CIA thought the agent had succeeded in placing a modern electronic microtransmitter given to him for that purpose in no less a place than the office of Comrade Osmany Cienfuegos, Secretary to the Executive Committee of the Council of Ministers. Hence the CIA's certainty in assuming it would receive, in plenty of time, the pertinent information of any trip abroad made by the Cuban prime minister.

Those who believe the CIA has changed one iota because of the denunciations its hair-raising actions have caused within United States society itself are deeply mistaken. Its methods will simply become more subtle and more perfidious.

Why did the CIA want to know the exact itinerary of the prime minister's possible trip to Angola and other African countries in honor of November 11? Why did it want to know what measures would be taken to avoid and prevent terrorist acts?

Considering the importance of this fact and the enlightening value it has in terms of the CIA's conduct and activities, we have considered it appropriate to reveal it publicly, although this implies the sacrifice of a valuable source of information (Applause).

Three years ago the Cuban government signed an agreement with the United

States government on air and maritime piracy and other crimes. This was an important contribution on the part of our country to the solution of the serious world problem of skyjacking. The Cuban government demanded no conditions whatsoever for signing that agreement, not even the end of the criminal economic blockade the United States government has maintained against our country. Moreover, without any legal obligation whatsoever, Cuba returned to a United States enterprise the two

million dollars some skyjackers had brought with them and which was confiscated by our authorities.

On one occasion, Cuban authorities at the Rancho Boyeros airport saved the lives of a number of United States citizens proceeding from Florida when the plane had to make an emergency landing after United States police had shot up the tires in a futile attempt to keep it on the ground. We would have behaved in precisely the same way under any similar circumstances, strictly for humanitarian reasons.

How different from the brutal conduct of those who armed the assassins and inspired the destruction of our plane in Barbados!

Cuba has never and will never propagandize in favor of skyjackers, and is prepared to collaborate realistically with any responsible government in the struggle against air piracy and terrorism.

But the United States government has been incapable of fulfilling the spirit and letter of the agreement signed with Cuba in February, 1973.

After the unpunished assassination of a Cuban fisherman and the destruction of two boats by a pirate attack off the Florida coasts, we warned the United States government that if events such as those were repeated and their perpetrators were not properly punished, the agreement would no longer be valid (Applause).

There was no reply. The crime was neither investigated nor punished.

The agreement signed between the governments of the United States and Cuba on February 15, 1973, cannot survive this brutal crime (Applause and shouts of "Fidel, seguro, a los yanquis dales duro!" [Fidel, you bet, will get the Yankees yet]).

The Cuban government finds it necessary to cancel it and will, therefore, so inform the United States government this afternoon (Applause). According to the textual terms of that agreement, at any time during the period of its validity and by written renunciation made six months beforehand, one of the parties can communicate to the other its decision to end the agreement. Strictly adhering to the agreement and proceeding to notification of its renunciation today, October 15, 1976, said agreement will have validity only up to April 15, 1977, and we will not again sign any such agreement with the United States (Applause) until the terrorist campaign unleashed against Cuba is definitively terminated, effective guarantees against these actions are made to our people and there is a final end to United States acts of hostility and aggression against Cuba (Applause). There can be no collaboration of any kind between an aggressor country and a country under attack.

If after April 15, 1977, when the validity of the agreement ends, any US commercial plane should be detoured to Cuba, the plane as well as the crew and passengers will be given every facility to return immediately to their country (Applause).

Cuba will never encourage skyjacking nor will it be tolerant with its perpetrators, but Cuba cannot maintain virtually unilateral commitments to return or punish such perpetrators with a government that bears the basic responsibility for this infamous terrorist offensive against our country.

The agreements of a similar nature signed with Canada, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, will remain fully valid.

Cuba is also prepared to collaborate with Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Barbados and other countries of the Caribbean and Central America capable of acting in good faith, in any joint measures considered appropriate in combating these crimes.

Cuba is even ready to discuss with the United States, whichever government is elected in November, a solution to these problems; but I repeat, on the basis of the definitive halting of all acts of hostility and

aggression against our country (Applause).

We might ask ourselves what is the purpose of these crimes? To destroy the Revolution? (Exclamations of "No!") That is impossible. Faced with the cowardice and monstrosity of such crimes, the people are inflamed, and every man and woman becomes a fervent and heroic soldier prepared to die (Applause).

The Revolution has taught us all the idea of human fraternity and solidarity. It has made us all the most profound brothers among whom the blood of one belongs to all and the blood of all belongs to each of the others (Applause). So it is that the sorrow is everyone's, the mourning is everyone's, but the invincible strength of millions of people is our strength. And our strength is not only the strength of one people, it is the strength of all the peoples who have now freed themselves from slavery and of all those in the world who struggle to eliminate exploitation, injustice and crime from human society (Applause).

In short, our strength is the strength of patriotism and the strength of internationalism. The ideas we fight for are the banner for the world's most honest and worthy men and women and the certain and victorious emblem of the world of tomorrow.

Imperialism, capitalism, fascism, neocolonialism, racism, man's brutal exploitation of man in all its forms and manifestations, is approaching its end in humanity's history, and their maddened lackeys know it; that is why their reactions are ever more desperate, more hysterical, more cynical, more impotent. Only that can explain such repugnant and absurd crimes as the one in Barbados.

For more than 100 years, the shooting of the medical students in 1871 has been recalled and condemned with inextinguishable indignation. For thousands of years our people will recall, will condemn and will abhor in their deepest souls this horrible assassination.

Our athletes sacrificed in the flower of their life and intelligence will be eternal champions in our hearts (Applause); their gold medals will not lie on the ocean floor but will rise like unblemished suns and symbols in the Cuban firmament; they will not win the honor of the Olympics but they have ascended for all time to the beautiful Olympus of martyrs of the homeland!

Our crew members, our heroic aviation workers and all our selfless compatriots sacrificed under cowardly circumstances that day, will live eternally in the memory, the affection and the admiration of the people! (Applause). A homeland ever more revolutionary, more worthy, more socialist and more internationalist (Applause) will be the grandiose monument our people will erect to their memory and that of all those who have died or will die for the Revolution! (Applause).

To our Guyanese and Korean brothers immolated that day goes our most fervent recollection at this time also. They remind us that imperialism's crimes have no borders, that we all belong to the same human family and that our struggle is universal (Applause).

We cannot say that the sorrow is shared. The sorrow is multiplied. Millions of Cubans shed their tears today together with the dear ones of the victims of the abominable crime. And when an energetic and forceful people cry, injustice trembles!

Patria o Muerte! Venceremos! (Ovation)

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