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CUBA

PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: CUBAN INDEPENDENCE DAY
ROOM 450, OEOB
MONDAY, MAY 22, 1989

My friends, it is truly a pleasure to be with you to celebrate this wonderful occasion: The 87th anniversary of Cuban independence.

Now, I know that the official anniversary was Saturday, not today. Let's get that straight [PAUSE] . . . after all, remember Pearl Harbor.

But, you know, I would be delighted to be here on any day. For we Americans owe a debt of gratitude to the Cuban people.

That debt dates back to 1776, when George Washington's troops were dreadfully short of food and supplies. Some of you may remember how the women of Havana banded together and raised 1.2 million livres for the cause of American freedom.

One hundred and twenty-six years later, another people fought bravely for the cause of freedom. For it was on May 20, 1902, after a long and brutal struggle, that the Cuban Republic was born.

We gather here to remember that victory. And the fact that freedom knows no boundaries. Perhaps it was the Abraham Lincoln of Cuba, that great patriot Jose Marti [Mar-TEE], who said it best. He remarked, "To beautify life is to give it an object."

My friends, our object is human liberty. And a free, united, and democratic Cuba. As President, I am absolutely, unalterably committed to Cuba Libre. And I will never falter in that support.

I know that you are with me. And so is America. For we oppose those who mock the rights we treasure: rights of speech, religion, assembly, and economic freedom. And in response, our demand is plain and simple: "Democracy, Mr. Castro -- not some time, not some day, but now."

This morning, I call on Fidel Castro to free all political prisoners. And to conform to accepted international standards regarding human rights. I challenge him to allow unrestricted access to organizations monitoring their compliance. And a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.

On this, Cuban Independence Day, I challenge Castro to take concrete and specific steps to begin democracy's electoral process. And to allow free and unrestricted travel to and from Cuba for all persons -- including present citizens and residents.

This I pledge: Unless these conditions are met -- basic conditions, elemental -- we will oppose Cuba's re-entry to the Organization of American States. And this, too, I promise: We will continue Radio Marti. We will create TV Marti. We will see that the people of Cuba know the truth -- about their dictator, and about the world.

In short, we want to advance that day when Cuban Independence Day achieves a new and richer meaning:

- Freedom from the evil of tyranny and oppression;
- Freedom from the economic misery wrought by communist misrule;
- The freedom that can liberate lives and lift the human heart -- yes, the freedom of democracy.

To achieve that freedom, heroes must lead the way. Well, in a sense they already have, and are. For Cuba can claim many heroes -- those who struggled valiantly almost ninety years ago, and those who struggle today.

Heroes, for example, like Dr. Claudio Benedi, here in this audience, who has condemned -- eloquently, repeatedly -- Castro's

violations of human rights. Or another great patriot of the Western Hemisphere -- a hero of our times.

I'm referring, of course, to Armando Valladares. He spent 22 years in Castro's prisons. And he wrote a book about that ordeal, and his ultimate release. It's titled Against All Hope. And it describes how he survived beatings, starvation, and unspeakable horror.

I'm sure many of you have read this unforgettable tribute. A tribute to the arching human spirit -- to that will to live which helped endure the cruelest of regimes. A tribute, also, to the courage of the Cuban people -- resolute and unafraid.

My friends, that courage has helped you endure. And it will one day unite a million free Cuban-Americans with their long-suffering Cuban brothers.

For if hope can stay alive in the heart of Armando Valladares, surely we will see Cuba free again.

Thank you for coming here, God bless you, God bless America, and Viva Cuba Libre.

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