

Reflection Roundtable of the Moderate Opposition

Havana, January 5, 2003

First of all, we would like to thank the organizers of this event for the opportunity to participate in the always urgent and unpostponable exchange of ideas. Those of us who are obliged to imagine an adult nation from the vantage point of an unnecessarily divided Cuba must work to build a reality of perpetual dialogue on the ruins of perpetual revolution.

The best starting point for envisioning and reassembling the nation is national reconciliation. This process should not be restricted to the tactical operations of a political pact, but rather open itself to a strategic vision of our cultural foundations. Our coming apart is essentially a cultural one, and it is through culture that we must begin to come back together.

Everything began to go wrong when our elites lost the ability to hear, the power of dialogue, the rhythm of moderation, the concept of nationhood, and the charter of our rights and responsibilities as citizens. With these elements destroyed, it became very difficult to reproduce the virtuous circle that leads from a nation of culture to a nation of institutions.

At this point, we urgently need that ability, that power, that rhythm, that concept and that charter to keep our strategic reconciliation from becoming mired in tactics. Interests must be subordinated to values. For us, national reconciliation is the basis for potential democratization.

With luck, this reconciliation will come in a new context. The exhaustion and loss of prestige that result from the use of violence to settle differences and as a vehicle for social and political agendas delegitimize historical rhythms.

Cuba is the perfect example of this phenomenon. The so-called revolution—with its institutionalized violence—failed to produce sustainable and sustained progress toward freedom. Likewise, the so-called counterrevolution—with its violence in the Everglades—could not fulfill its democratic promise. Both processes, out of synch with each other, are stalled by the indifference of their supposed beneficiaries and by the powerful indicator of human rights.

Behind their hard-line, absolutist rhetoric, Cubans find reconciliation in their families, religion, culture, a healthy rapprochement toward minorities, and an informal but powerful demand to be acknowledged as subjects.

These facts have the ability to do away with intolerance, the cultural fuel of the historical machinery of violence.

If we take a moment to listen to the cultural nation within this divided country, we will realize that the process of reconciliation has already started. Certain elites have divorced themselves from our nation, and not vice versa. For this reason, the reconciliation must extend to those who, from the vantage point of political, economic, and cultural power, attempt to mold a nation that no longer wishes to be held hostage to inherited, atavistic behavior.

The greatest responsibility for completing the circle of reconciliation lies, therefore, with our elites: those in the closed ranks of the government who, against all evidence to the contrary in the nation's streets and homes, continue to regard themselves as the sole, legitimate interpreters of social truths; and those other elites who, understandably desperate to see the emergence of another Cuba, propose political agendas that imply the physical reinvention of the country and who, in their search for civilized channels of communication between the Cubans of yesterday, today and tomorrow, know that the nation would be lost in the absurd reproduction of its divisions.

Because the challenge is, above all, to find those civilized channels of communication, we understand national reconciliation as an effort aimed at the very roots of our society to restore the harmony and equilibrium that were lost through the exercise of different forms of violence, inequality, injustice, and dominance over the course of our history. It is, in essence, a process of incorporation that ethically encompasses all sectors of society—politics, economics, culture and family relations—and that seeks to achieve social and personal peace through forgiveness, dialogue, negotiation, and participation as the means to the consolidation and completion of the Cuban nation.

Understood in this way, national reconciliation should be the basis of our political agenda—not the agenda of Cuban democratization, but rather its foundation.

In response to the negative results of violence—whether psychological, physical or verbal—reconciliation should begin with the ethical vindication and practical moralization of the basic instruments of politics: dialogue, negotiation, compromise, and agreement. Historically, these concepts have not enjoyed much prestige among Cubans or served their symbolic legitimizing purpose. We find our heroes in the ranks of those who waged peace through war, not those who pursued this end through pacific means. Without undermining the idea that fundamental solutions are found through a sound dialogue, we must recognize that our reconciliation will come up against the barriers of prejudice and memory.

Dialogue in the social and political sphere and forgiveness in the moral sphere constitute the potential bases of a successful reconciliation.

To achieve reconciliation **in the present and the future**, we need a dialogue on at least four basic levels: **a dialogue among citizens** that includes all Cubans on an individual basis; a **social dialogue** that is open to all sectors and minorities; an **institutional dialogue** that facilitates exchange and closer cooperation with and between institutions; and a **political dialogue** that establishes the foundations of democratization. The religious concept of forgiveness also comes into play if we seek a definitive reconciliation of **the present with the past**. A willingness to “wipe the slate clean” will be important in preventing memory from becoming an obstacle to national reunion.

We believe that we can achieve pluralism and diversity based on the public and rational consensus of our citizens. This is how we will rebuild democracy—not through an assault on institutions, but rather through a political process that has its foundations in the civic nation we will restore through national reconciliation.

The Reflection Roundtable is working on an essential prerequisite for the democratization of Cuba and part of the basic content of any attempt at national reconciliation: human rights.

The **Preliminary Project for a Cuban Bill of Fundamental Rights and Responsibilities**, which to date has consulted more than 28,000 Cubans of all backgrounds, is a result of our conviction that a democratic nation must first respect individual rights.

In this way, we will create a civil society—the repository of pluralism, difference and diversity—civilized by dialogue and a consensus of values. It will give rise to a creatively anticipated democracy, preceded in turn by national reconciliation.

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