

Students and Activists Declare Their Commitment to Struggle for a Free Cuba on the 40th Anniversary of the 13 de Marzo



On March 13, 1997 at Florida International University student activists who have been fighting for the cause of Cuba's freedom since 1968 came together to declare once again their commitment for a free Cuba. Members of **Abdala**, Cuban Committee for Human Rights, Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano, Generation 90, and the FREE CUBA Foundation spoke of their experiences through the years and addressed current problems.

The event began with Janisset Rivero of the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano introducing an 11 minute video produced by Dr. Juan Clark which described the rafter crisis and the events leading up to the shootdown of the two Brothers to the Rescue planes on February 24, 1996 between 3:20 and 3:28pm. Mario De La Peña was a member of the Directorio Revolucionario Democratico Cubano, and Armando Alejandro Jr was an FIU alumnus.

John Suarez of the FREE CUBA Foundations introduced the speakers and explained the purpose of this event. According to Mr. Suarez, "March 13, 1957, July 13, 1994, and February 24, 1996 are three tragic dates in Cuban history tied together for two reasons: on all three dates youth were brutally murdered, and each date, in a cause and effect fashion, leads to the next. The massacre of Cuba's young democratic leadership on March 13 opened a vacuum filled by Fidel Castro. Fidel Castro made Cuba a living hell which has driven millions of Cubans to leave the island, and the regime has sought with violence to stop this flight to freedom. The July 13 massacre of men, women and children aboard the 13 de Marzo tugboat is just another barbaric example. The outrage of the July 13 massacre touched the Cuban nation profoundly. It led to the overflights of Havana one year later on July 13, 1995 which so outraged the Castro regime that they shot down the planes over international waters on February 24, 1996. This is why the 40th anniversary of the Assault on the Presidential Palace on March 13, 1957 should be a time to reflect on what is happened, and what is left to be done."

Lorenzo De Toro III of G-90 spoke of the internal opposition and their need for support from the exile. Citing the examples of the dissidents in Poland and Czechoslovakia he predicted that the future leaders of Cuba are in Cuba and need our active support. De Toro played a recording of support for this reunion by one of the internal opposition groups.

Sebastian Arcos Cazabon of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights spoke of the present plight of the political prisoners and their families inside of Cuba. He called on the community to support the families of these political prisoners. When you are arrested for opposing the regime you go to prison, your relatives are blackballed, and your immediate family is unemployable. Without outside assistance there is no internal opposition.

Juan Jose De Castro of the DRDC made the argument for the necessity of using non-violence as a tool to struggle against the Castro tyranny. He observed that the opposition to Castro does not have an army,

and therefore making a war is impossible. Furthermore, that one of our main flaws as Cubans has been our embracing of a culture of violence.

Ana M. Carbonell of the Alliance of Young Cubans spoke of their battle to raise awareness in Canada. The Alliance had raised funds and bought billboards which read: Your Paradise...Their Hell. The billboards contrast the tourists paradise with the Hell the Cuban people are suffering under an oppressive tyranny.

Pedro Solares of Abdala spoke of the necessity to integrate the current generation into the struggle against tyranny and injustice. He spoke of the days when many believed that socialism was the future, and how Abdala stood up to this tide of popular belief, and said No! He spoke of chaining themselves to the Statue of Liberty and shutting it down when Pedro Luis Boitel, a student leader, died on hunger strike in a Cuban dungeon.

At the end of the presentations, and the questions and answers that followed a declaration was signed by the various organizations. The FIU Declaration declared its support for the principles set out by Concilio Cubano, and pledges to support the leadership of the internal opposition, increase awareness of the plight of the political prisoners, embrace the principle of non-violent resistance, and call on the exile community to educate the present generation on the ongoing tragedy in Cuba.

The event ended with Janisset Rivero reading a list of the fallen brothers from the 13 de Marzo, and February 24 massacres. After each name the audience cried out "Presente." The last four names read out were: Armando Alejandro Jr. , Carlos Costa, Mario De La Peña, and Pablo Morales. After each of their names was read the audience cried out the loudest "Presentes" of the evening.