

**Statement by Deputy-Minister Martin Palouš,
Head of the Czech Delegation at the 55th Session of the
Commission on Human Rights**

Madam Chairperson,

I have the honour to present on behalf of the co-authors and co-sponsors of the draft resolution on "Human Rights in Cuba", the next contained in document E/CN.4/99/L.14, circulated to the Commission on 15 April 1999. The co-authors of the resolution are the Czech Republic and Poland. The co-sponsors are ...

The draft resolution expresses concern of these countries over the violation of human rights in Cuba, which has dangerously intensified in recent months: In fact, the Cuban government has been neglecting the fundamental principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights systematically for years. Nevertheless, there are at least two immediate reasons why we present our motion at this session: the recent adoption of the new laws which limit the exercise of fundamental rights, and the worsening of the situation of many courageous Cubans who endure persecution and years in prison for their loyalty to the ideals of freedom, democracy and human dignity.

Our action is based on the recognition of and the respect for the elementary standards of the International Bill of Rights, valid for all members of the international community and underlying all activities of this Commission. The principle we want to defend is very simple: If we believe that human rights are indivisible and of a universal nature, we must be ready to defend them not only when our own fate and well-being are at stake, but also when others are being deprived of them, - in whichever part of the world.

The co-authors, the Czech Republic and Poland, have strong reasons to take this step. These reasons largely stem from their own historical experience with the same totalitarian system as the one now practised in Cuba. Former dissidents learned to appreciate the value of support from the democratic world, and above all from institutions such as this Commission, when they were themselves persecuted not so long ago. Our Commitment to help other people persecuted for human rights originates from there.

The co-sponsors of the draft resolution contained in L-14 have tried to respond to these considerations. While the resolution welcomes the first steps made by the Government of Cuba with respect to religious freedom and to allowing thematic special rapporteurs to visit the country, it expresses concern about the recent adoption of the "Law for the protection of Cuba's National Independence and Economy" and the persecution of dissidents, most recently the imprisonment of the four authors of the document "The Motherland Belongs to Everyone". It calls on the Government of Cuba to release all the persons detained or imprisoned for peacefully expressing their political religious and social views and for exercising their rights to a full and equal participation in public affairs. The resolution also invites the Government of Cuba to open the country to full contacts with the democratic world, in order to ensure the enjoyment of all human

rights for all people without distinction.

The resolution, while being critical, is definitely not confrontational. Its underlying philosophy is the promotion of international dialogue and cooperation. Its aim is not only to condemn what we consider as evident and blatant violations of human rights, but also to signal the readiness to extend a helping hand to Cuba. The international community declares here unequivocally its sincere will to assist Cuba in developing a more pluralistic society and a more efficient economy.

Let me now make a few additional points on behalf of the Czech Delegation. After all, it was in Prague, and not anywhere else, that the idea to initiate this resolution came from. For us, Czechs, Cuba is not an abstract or an exotic term, but a country known to many people from intensive contacts before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There is a long tradition of good relations between Czechs and Cubans and our motion is definitely not meant to throw it away.

Nevertheless, we made our own bitter experience with a political regime which paid no respect to human rights and kept our whole society closed for decades. We learned that there can be no real development, no economic prosperity, no well-being of the people, no constructive dialogue, no active involvement, without democracy, without the rule of law, without the honest and principled policy in the field of human rights.

Our experience makes us to believe that it is the internationalization of human rights that creates a favorable environment for peaceful international politics. And not only that: it is again the internationalization of human rights, that represents a "sine qua non" condition for efficient, rational and at the same time just forms of international economic cooperation. Our position has a clear implication: Isolation, any form of political or economic "containment", the absence of communication, the language of confrontation cannot bring us closer to our goal which is universal respect for human rights, but also economic and social development. Isolation and the feeling of hostile encirclement provides a fertile ground for the justification of repression. We have to commit ourselves and must be able to find other, more creative and more helpful approaches.

This resolution does not address the problems of development, but calls international attention to the unacceptable human rights situation in Cuba. Its content is balanced. The main reasons for its submission, at least on the Czech side, were stated in a letter sent by the President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, H.E. Mrs. M. Robinson (doc. E/CN.4/1999/135 of 30 March 1999). They can be characterized with (the French philosopher) Pascal as the "reasons of the heart" (*les raisons du coeur*): Ten years ago, the Czech dissidents (and one can easily add the Slovak, Polish, Hungarian and many other dissidents from East-Central Europe) were in a similar situation as many individuals in Cuba today and they highly appreciated any expression of international solidarity. It is not only difficult to forget that, but what else but a true spirit of solidarity and cooperation can be recommended as the basic principle of action for the international community?

Let me conclude with President Havel's words: "Only the voting result will show to what extent we will have succeeded in our intentions. Whatever the outcome, our conviction that his step is the right thing will remain unchanged. We can imagine ourselves in the position of those

whose cause we are advocating. Our own past history supplies ample evidence that far too often the roles of the defenders and the defended can be reversed.”

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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