THE LAWTON FOUNDATION'S PLANS FOR A NATION

In 1997, the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights decided to put into practice the principles of a series of nonviolent civil action and use as its stage the encounter that would take place at the Plaza Cívica José Martí where Pope John Paul II would offer a homily to the Cuban people. Our non-governmental organization's objective is to promote, among the Cuban citizens, the idea that it is possible to free ourselves of the tyrannical Castro regime through nonviolent political opposition, with a lesser amount of suffering for the people.

By the time the Pope entered the Plaza in Havana, members of the Lawton Foundation for Human rights had been holding up, for an hour, a sign, which on one side read "Remember the prisoners and those who suffer", and on the other " freedom for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience." This last phrase was accompanied by a list of the name of prisoners, among them those of the "*Patria es de Todos."*

We were violently expelled from the premises five minutes prior to the arrival of the head of state, Fidel Castro. Thanks to the protection of a few French priests and two journalists from Fox News, we were able to leave the Plaza, very worried but without major injuries.

Since then, the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights has worked with decorum, intelligence, altruistic love and perseverance to have the life of the unborn child and the human rights of the Cuban people respected.

The merit of the beautiful and intense work carried out by the Foundation has been recognized at the national and international levels. Nevertheless, the majority of its work has been carried out in silence and away from all publicity which could be interpreted as seeking the spotlight. That is why I congratulate all its members and encourage them to continue developing this worthy project.

We are planning to promote the strategy of nonviolent opposition as the ideal weapon that can be utilized by the Cuban democratic opposition movement in its struggle to gain liberty for our people and to have their human rights respected. And the courageous, loving, wise and patriotic words of the Arch- bishop of Santiago de Cuba, Pedro Meurice, filled us with an intense love of country which moved us to defy the state terrorism imposed on this unfortunate nation. Those words were:

"[…] Cuba is a nation with a deep vocation for solidarity, but throughout its history it has seem opportunities for association and participation in civil society dismantled or run aground, so I introduce to you the soul of a nation which yearns to rebuild fraternity based on freedom and solidarity."

"I wish to introduce to you, during this Eucharist, all those Cubans and those from Santiago who cannot find meaning to their life, who have not been able to choose and develop a course for their life due to a way of life of depersonalization, which is the fruit of paternalism."

"*I, also, introduce to you a growing number of Cubans who have mistaken the fatherland for a party, the nation for an ideology. They are Cubans who, by rejecting everything at once without discernment, feel uprooted, they reject what is ours and overvalue everything foreign. Some consider this to be one of the most serious reasons for internal and external exile.*

A decade later, our people feel inspired by the internal example of those who practice nonviolent opposition and by that overseas, by the nonviolent paradigms of the people of Northern Africa and the Middle East. The Cuban people under the leadership of the democratic opposition movement have consolidated nonviolent civil opposition as the strategic and tactical method to gain their freedom and establish democratic rule of law in their country.

According to Nathan Sharansky, dictatorial regimes, such as that of the Castro brothers, are societies of fear and "are characterized by a process of inexorable regression and collapse that can only be overcome with external help." That is why for years, I have strongly criticized the support given to the Communist dictatorship by civilized and developed nations.

According to Sharansky, Cuba's socialist system is in its final phase. Societies of fear, in their final stage, are characterized by an increase in state terrorism and in the number of individuals

who are double thinkers. If we add to that the system's loss of ideology, the system becomes even weaker due to the fact that it is a previously communist state whose ideology has outright failed. *Now, is precise moment to put an end to the Castro dictatorship through massive, nonviolent political opposition, and by the negation of support that can provide the system political legitimacy and international financial and economic resources.*

Our minds come up with ideas that are to no avail unless we have the will to put them into practice. The dictatorship, in order to stop thoughts of freedom from developing in daily life, blocks our will through fear and depersonalization, as well as by eliminating our self-worth to change us into instruments of their own design.

In order to break loose from that apathetic and weak state, it is necessary to open up the internal fountain of our free will. This can only be achieved through wholesome and pure protagonism such as that described by the Pope to the youth when he stated, "*Be the protagonists of your own personal and social histories." That is why I tell Cubans to resist those who are tired, feel like failures, have little love for the fatherland, are lacking in love and self-worth, those who are traitors, and to be protagonists of their own history in order to be a free people."*

The time has come for Cubans to overthrow the communist dictatorship that for over fifty years has destroyed our economy, educational and religious norms, our morals and our ethics of civilized co-existence. Let us not allow ourselves to be fooled by false proposals of change from the same government which has enslaved us for half a century no matter which institution, group, or individual makes the proposals. It is very unlikely that the Communist Party will carry out serious changes since during the past five years it has purged from its ranks those of a more moderate view. The communist orthodoxy persists at all levels of leadership and utilizes democratic centralism, in other words, the subordination of all members.

Nevertheless, let us assume that we reach utopia and that the communist regime is willing to carry out serious transformations. What should these be?

Ratify international agreements regarding human rights, especially civil and political ones.

Urgently institutionalize inalienable rights.

Repeal Article V of the Communist Constitution.

Allow the entry to, exit from, and permanence of all Cubans in the homeland with guarantee of having all their rights fully respected.

Guarantee the participation of Cuban exiles throughout the process of changing our country into a democracy.

Have all members of the current Council of State and the Government, and those connected to crimes against humanity resign.

The institutionalization of these essential requirements would be the preamble to acknowledging, analyzing and discussing a process of transition to democracy and freedom. Without these requirements, there is nothing to discuss.

On the other hand, it is necessary to be alert because the Castro government has immense political and economic power to carry out subversive policies. A classic example is how the Island's regime has been able to subvert the social order in Venezuela, Nicaragua and Ecuador while influencing Bolivia and potentially, Honduras. If this is what happens overseas, imagine what they could do here.

For example, the Castro government has demonstrated that it has the capability to infiltrate its intelligence agents into the leadership of democratic organizations, to destroy opposing organizations and to perpetrate extrajudicial assassinations of the leaders who are truly committed to the freedom of their people.

That is why it is wiser not to trust the government or those who want to prolong its existence, forgetting the many years of failure and cruel tyranny. It would be better to deposit our trust on the Biblical God and in our own efforts, supported by our people, who we can organize and train to strengthen them in the methods of nonviolent civil opposition. That is the only way to quickly achieve a lasting victory.

The Democratic opposition's triumph is possible and viable if we consolidate a strong internal opposition movement of nonviolent resistance with an ample social base.

A society of fear is supported by state terror combined with scientific methods to trigger psychological or psychiatric disorders in the population. Among these are post traumatic stress disorder and learned helplessness theory. These mental processes do not disappear from one day to the next when freedom is achieved; a prolonged period of time of medical treatment or the consolidation of democratic principles must transpire before people can trust in them and feel fulfilled and free.

I remain astonished and skeptical when I hear a proposal to present plebiscites and call for general elections under the control of the dictatorship or those who have recently abandoned it. The triumphant allies in Nazi Germany, Afghanistan and Iraq waited an appropriate time to gain the trust of each free citizen.

Cuba's period of transition must begin by recalling the nation's historical memory through applicable clauses of the Constitution of 1940, having a balance of independent powers and a provisional government consisting of democratic forces in the country. Once the nation achieves stability during the transition period, institutionalize a primary democratic constitution, as a basis for the local and regional elections and a democratic transitional government in preparation for general elections and the founding of a free Republic of Cuba.

An independent Judicial Power from the beginning of the Transition Period would allow for the Supreme Electoral Tribunal that would guarantee the organization and transparency of elections under the supervision of international organizations. It is imperative to review articles 184 and 185 of the Constitution of 1940. The Communist Constitution makes the atrocious constitutional error of having the judicial power be subordinate to the Legislative Assembly and the Executive Power.

Likewise, I believe it is of vital importance that the future Free Republic of Cuba is organized as a lay state in which a market economy predominates and the fundamental liberties of every citizen are fully respected. I believe that the republic must be built, starting today, with responsibility and intense public and professional debates that involve all branches of knowledge, including political science. In conclusion, I aspire to promote Livingstone's triad: Christianity, commerce and civilization. I will keep in mind that we belong to Western civilization; that of the Socratic civilization and Greek-Roman and Judeo-Christian culture.

I end with a quote of the enduring words of the beloved and admired Monsignor Pedro Meurice: "For years, this nation has defended the sovereignty of its geographical territory with real dignity, but we have somewhat forgotten that that independence must come forth from the human being who holds up, from the bottom, all plans as a nation." Amen