Speech by Bruno Rodríguez Parilla, Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the Haiti Donors Meeting

"Generosity and Political Will is Needed"

Mr. President,

The international community has a tremendous debt with Haiti where, after three centuries of colonialism, the first social revolution in the Western Hemisphere has taken place, as a bulwark that the colonial powers punished with close to 200 years of military dictatorships and plunder. Its noble and hardworking people are now the poorest in the Western hemisphere.

We all have the moral obligation to contribute additional financial resources and greater cooperation to Haiti, not only for its reconstruction but, in particular, for its development.

In order to have an idea of the magnitude of the human tragedy in Haiti, suffice it to note that there are 30 million people in its small and high-density population, equivalent to the death of more than 30 million people in a country such as China, whose population reaches a total of 1.3 billion inhabitants; an unimaginable tragedy.

In the wake of this devastating earthquake that took the conscience of humanity, we trust that the numerous promises heard will be converted into action, that Haiti’s independence and sovereignty will be respected and ennobled, that the government of President Rene Preval and Prime Minister Jean Max Bellerive will be facilitated to exercise their government and Cuban governments, with the presence of all its faculties, and that it will be able to benefit, not the whites and foreign companies, but the Haitian people, especially the poorest.

Generosity and political will is needed. Also needed is the unity of that country instead of its division into market plots and dubious charitable projects.

The program for the reconstruction and strengthening of the Haitian national healthcare system, drawn up by the Haitian government and Cuban governments, with the cooperation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and other countries and humanitarian organizations, will guarantee wide health coverage for the population, in particular the low-income sector.

That program is based on 101 primary healthcare centers which are being created, at which an estimated 2.8 million patients will be treated, 1.3 million emergency operations performed, 168,000 babies delivered, and 3 million vaccinations administered every year.

These health centers will be supported by the services of 30 community reference hospitals distributed throughout the country and equipped with cutting-edge technology for secondary attention, which can treat 2.154 million people per year, perform 54,000 operations – 1 million of these emergency surgery –, 276,000 electro-cardiograms, 144,000 diagnostic ultrasounds, 43,000 endoscopies, 181,000 X-Rays, 177,000 dental examinations, and 487,000 laboratory tests.

Given the extraordinary number of poly-traumatized patients, 20 rehabilitation rooms are likewise being equipped which, within 12 months, will provide services for 520,000 patients.

There will also be three electrophysiology centers, a prosthesis laboratory and an integral hygiene and epidemiology program.

Also planned is a Haitian National Specialized Hospitals at tertiary level, involving cooperation from other countries, directed by six high-level Cuban specialists responsible for services and clinical departments, research and teaching, and Haitian professionals who will be trained at the institution and progressively replace the Cuban medical professors.

The cost of the already mentioned services will amount to $650.5 million over 10 years, a total that includes the medical services provided, calculated at 50% of international prices; the sustainability of these services and the personnel providing them; and the training of a further 312 Haitian doctors in Cuba.

As can be deduced, the approximate cost is $270 million per year for a country of approximately 9.33 million inhabitants. It is possible to do this. Our practical experience confirms it. In fact, this program is already underway and, post-quake, 23 of these primary care health centers, 15 community reference hospitals and 21 rehabilitation rooms are up and running.

From almost immediately after the earthquake, Cuban specialists have been dedicating their attention to the population affected. To date they have seen 260,000 patients, performed more than 7,000 operations, delivered close to 4,600 babies, and administered close to 100,000 vaccinations.

More than 50,000 patients have undergone rehabilitation therapy and more than 75,000 children have received psychosocial therapy, in the presence of some of Cuba’s most eminent professionals.

A total of 783 Cuban and 461 Haitian doctors, plus 278 health professionals from 28 countries, all of them graduated in Cuba, are working on this program.

Last Saturday [March 27], as part of the program outlined, a memorandum of understanding for the strengthening of the healthcare and public services system and epidemiological prevention was signed in Port-au-Prince, thanks to the will of the Haitian government and a significant contribution from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, which will be decisive for the planned healthcare program.

Is Iraq an Issue?

“Operation Iraq Freedom” was the promising name given the US-led mission in Iraq when bombs first started pounding the country in 2003. Iraqis, then and now, never thought that things would soon be liberalized from the dictator Saddam Hussein and could look forward to a better future brought to them by the US and UK forces.

Fast forward to 2010. The war has cost nearly 1.5 million Iraqi lives, plus the lives of more than 600,000 foreign troops. 4.5 million people are now refugees inside or outside Iraq (Iraq Displacement and Statistics Assessment 2007). In financial terms, more than $3 trillion has been spent on the war by the US alone. This is the heavy price of “freedom” in Iraq. But now that all these dollars and lives have been spent, is the war at least over? Can Iraqis now be considered free? Both the statistics and the bombed-out shells of buildings shout a resounding “no”.

Mr. President,

The change in focus is intentional. By shifting from Iraq to Afghanistan, major outlets like the BBC are mouthpieces for the US, Canada and UK governments are hoping to draw our attention away from Iraq, giving the impression that things are now more or less stable and under control. But beyond the narrow view afforded by the lens of the major media, what is life like for Iraqi people?

Continued on the back page...
Afghan Message is Clear: US/CANADA/NATO OUT NOW!

If you walk down the streets of Afghani-
stan’s capital, Kabul, today, you would notice
that much has changed since the 2001 US/
Canada/NATO invasion and occupation of
the country. There are many new things in
the capital, but there are also many old
newsflashes that few other than foreigners
can stop in, new billboards ad
tersing cell phones that most Afghans
could never dream of owning, new flashy
hotels where foreign investors and diplo-
mat stay.

There is also new poverty. Thousands of
refugees displaced by the occupation live
in refugee camps on the outskirts of Ka-
bul. Poverty has a new face, too. In addition
to skyrocketing rates of opium addiction
across Afghanistan which have come with the
occupation, intravenous drug use has shown
up for the first time, bringing with it at least
hundreds, probably thousands of cases of
HIV and AIDS — a disease previously un-
heard of in Afghanistan.

For Afghan women in particular, the situa-
tion is dire. Many who have lost husbands
and sons to war are forced into prostitution
in order to survive. Others must sell their
of Afghanistan by Canada’s foreign affairs
department noted that, “Self-immolation
[committing suicide by lighting oneself on
fire] is being used by increasing numbers of
Afghan women to escape their dire circum-
cstances and women constitute the major-
ity of Afghan suicides.” This has left many
Afghans wondering “is this the freedom
that the West – US, Canada and NATO — were supposed to bring us?”

Moving to rural Afghanistan, where 80
percent of the population lives, the situa-
tion is also grim. Promises by the occupa-
tion forces to bring security and develop-
ment have been pronounced with the thousands
of 500-pound bombs being dropped on
Afghan villages. Wedding parties have been
a favorite target of the bombers. The UN
states that 2009 was the worst year for civil-
ian casualties in Afghanistan.

Beyond the thousands of soldiers, tanks,
helicopters and bombs, though, little has
changed. The occupation has brought with
it virtually no development beyond a few
schools and clinics for those in some mar-
jor population centers. The main hospital
in Kandahar province, Mirwais, is severely
overcrowded and without basic supplies like
antiseptic and oxygen. In most rural areas,
a doctor is hours or days away.

Even the simple and basic necessity of wa-
ter has not been provided by the occupation
forces. Three-quarters of the Afghan popu-
lation is still without access to safe drink-
rage water, despite the fact that hundreds of
wells could be built for the cost of sending
even one soldier to Afghanistan. Similarly,
only 13% of the country has access to im-
proved sanitation, another basic need. Add-
ing up the destruction and broken promises
of development, it is little wonder that more
and more Afghans are turning against the
occupation.

With Obama’s announcement of the troop
surge in Afghanistan came the announce-
ment of a new focus of war against the
people of Pakistan. A major part of the aim
of the troop surge was not only to stop the
resurgence of the Taliban, but also to crush
the growing resistance in Pakistan. Three
million Afghans refugees live across the
border in Pakistan, and Afghanistan and
Pakistan also share a huge cultural connec-
tion through the large Pakhtun population
that lives on both sides of the Afghanistann
Pakistan border. As the war in Afghanistan
has intensified, killing more civilians and
destroying more communities, resistance to
this war has grown among the Afghan refu-
gee community in Pakistan as well. In 2008,
the US began attacks on this resistance move-
through bombings by unmanned drone planes.
These bombings have killed over 1000 Paki-
tani people, including many women and children. Rather
than crushing the resistance in Pakistan,
though, these bombings have only added
fuel to the fire, as opposition grows to the
US presence in Pakistan.

Can we believe the role in the occupation
of Afghanistan was recently brought into the
international spotlight with the scandal of
Canada’s involvement in torturing Afghan detainees. In November 2009, Canadian
diplomat Richard Colvin brought testimo-
ny to the Parliament in Ottawa that thousands
of detainees have been crushed by the thousands
of 500-pound bombs being dropped on
Afghan villages. Wedding parties have been
a favorite target of the bombers. The UN
states that 2009 was the worst year for civil-
ian casualties in Afghanistan.

Trends” report from US-based think-tank the
Center for Strategic and International Studies,
It was stated that “The current levels of violence
remain too high for the US to simply carry out a
“responsible withdrawal,” and go to a “normal
embassy” in 2012. The US will need to create
strong military and State Department advisory
teams to help Iraq’s armed forces, police forces,
and security forces continue to improve. It will
need to continue to provide aid to develop Iraq’s
forces, and make significant transfers of the mil-
itary equipment now in Iraq. It will need to sus-
tain aid in improving Iraq’s rule of law, and in
improving the quality and sustainability of Iraqi
forces at least through 2014 — and probably
for years in the future.”

Troops Out Now!

There is no “exit strategy” for Iraq. In fact, the
plan for Iraq is to “stabilize” the country in US
interests for a long-term US military presence
in the region. The last eight years of occupation
have brought nothing but horror and destruc-
tion to the Iraqi people — anyone who cares
about human lives and human sustainability of
must shudder to think what an occupation long into
the future will bring.

It is our responsibility as human beings to de-
mand an immediate withdrawal of all foreign
forces from Iraq. This has been the demand
of the Iraqi people for several years now, and
more than ever is the time for us to echo it in
Canada, the US and around the world.

US Out Of Iraq!

Self-Determination for Iraq!

Troops Home Now!

www.mawovancouver.org