

The following is an excerpt and translation from the Cuban Newspaper, Granma¹.

President Carter's comments are a direct transcription from a videotape of his speech to faculty and students at the University of Havana, Cuba on May 14, 2002. Where President Carter's comments were inaudible, a translation of the interpreter's translation was substituted. Therefore, it is important to note that this re-translation may result in some variation from what President Carter actually said. (Translation by 3DWORD.)

Opening remarks by Juan Vela Valdes, President of UH (this preceded President Carter's speech):

Chief Commander Fidel Castro Ruz, President of State Councils and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba; Honorable James Carter, former President of the United States of America, Honorable Mrs. Rosalynn Carter and distinguished members of Mr. Carter's committee; Members of the Party Directorate, the Government and the National Assembly of the People's Power of the Republic of Cuba-

Dear members of the University Council, professors, students and guests:

In the name of the University of Havana, at the historical Magna Classroom of the very first Cuban university, I have the honor of welcoming Mr. James Carter, former President of the United States from 1977 through 1981, his distinguished wife and the fine people accompanying him.

Without a doubt, Mr. Carter's visit is of vital importance to us. For the very first time since 1959, a former President of the United States visits Cuba. Their country, as ours - linked in many ways for more than two centuries - shares a common past and present, as common as the oceans bathing our shores and which often create disproportionate storms.

It is in this sense that Mr. Carter's presence in our country represents, symbolically, that there is always a possibility of open exchanges and honest dialogues amongst peers. This is particularly so in today's difficult times, when the global situation is ruled by profound tension and conflicts, and from which our respective nations' bilateral relationship does not escape. It is fair to acknowledge that it may have been his years as President that allowed us to foresee new avenues, even while immersed in complex and contradictory situations. Even as Governor of the state of Georgia, Mr. Carter stood out for his criticisms of and humanitarian approach to key world problems, such as the environment, increasing drug abuse, and issues faced by young people. During his Presidential campaign, Mr. Carter advocated world peace, and spoke out against racism. He was, and is, in favor of help to underdeveloped countries, respect for democracy and human rights. During his administration, *Secciones de Intereses* (Interest Sections) were established in Havana and Washington, which allowed constructive agreements and fostered dialogue.

Years later, the opening of The Carter Center at Emory University in Atlanta, reaffirmed Mr. Carter's and his wife's commitment to take on many challenges in search of a better world, a beautiful hope that many of us believe possible.

¹ Translated from "*Es necesario encontrar las vías para el entendimiento, la tolerancia y la paz.*" *Granma*, Havana, Cuba, Year 38, Number 117, May 16, 2002.

Furthermore, I would like to point out the profound respect the Cuban people and particularly the academic community have for the American people. The history and the culture of the country that gave birth to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln is in no way strange to men, women, politicians, intellectuals and students. The ideas and causes that their founding fathers stood for, along with the historic events of the last century, are as familiar to us as the works of their greatest writers and creators across diverse fields. The Cuban people also know that Jose Marti, one of our nation's heroes, who was raised with the independent and political ideology of Felix Varela, whose ashes are kept here in this Aula Magna, he, that is to say, Jose Marti spent his last fifteen years in the United States. These years were the most decisive and transcendent of his life as intellectual and revolutionary. It was during this time that his sharp political insight allowed him to weigh the dramatic situation arising in the second half of the 19th century. It was this vision, which he recorded on many imperishable pages, where he also left the legacy of respect and appreciation for that country; the same country, whose current government maintains and strengthens the economic embargo against Cuba, which causes countless, immeasurable suffering to the Cuban people.

Today, the University of Havana, founded in 1728, has 15 academic programs where majors are offered in natural and exact sciences, liberal arts, social sciences, economics and social work. The graduates in social work play an important role in improving the standard of living for the country. This more than 200-year-old university also has twenty centers for study and investigation in these same disciplines. Its academic and scientific research work, along with its active presence in Cuban history, make this university an integral part of the national culture, as well as the social and economic development that has been taking place in Cuba for the last four decades. Already numbering more than 63, these institutions of higher learning, distributed throughout all provinces, have graduated more than 700,000 professionals.

Within this history, a major role is played by the students, whose Federation of University Students is about to celebrate its 80th anniversary, and has a renowned place on the political and cultural events of our nation.

The open and generous arms of our alma mater have embraced not only the students, who day after day come to learn, but it has also embraced distinguished visitors from all around the world, including American students, many of whom are here in this assembly. This is just an example of what can be done, even in the most difficult situations, to find understanding, tolerance and peace.

With this certitude in our hearts, I am very honored, your most excellent Mr. James Carter, to again welcome you to the University of La Havana.

((President Carter's speech followed))

Juan Vela Valdes' remarks opening Q & A portion: I would like to thank Mr. Carter for his involvement. As is customary with university visits from heads of state, scientists and other distinguished people, he has kindly offered the university community present here today, students and professors of the University of Havana, the ability to have discussions with him regarding the topics he has covered and, in the end, other topics our young students and professors may wish to discuss.

Therefore, the approach we will take will be to ask for raised hands. Those who wish to ask a question, please raise your hand.

I ask both students and professors to identify themselves, giving their names and majors.

Miguel Fraga, senior law student:

Good Afternoon.

I would first like to thank you, Mr. Carter, for this opportunity.

I have paid close attention to your words and have taken some notes while you were speaking.

Within the warmth of your words, I would first ask that you allow me to make a short reflection.

We live in the 21st century and suffer the consequences of an unjust world order. Poverty, hunger and diseases scar the lives of millions of human beings. These human beings are told and taught about liberty, human rights, democracy...

To quote one statistic, each year more than 10 million children die because of poverty all around the world. This is according to the United Nations Children's Fund Summit recently held in your country.

Mr. President, we have a difference in opinion, as you have correctly indicated. With all due respect, is it democratic to not be able to guarantee those fundamental rights of life, education and health? Can we talk about a democratic America, when in many countries there are people suffering because of such adverse conditions?

Mr. President, for us, democracy is the very real power of people to guarantee these rights and not just write them on a piece of paper.

Mr. President, with all due respect, I would like to hear your insight on whether it is possible to speak of democracy without speaking of social justice or of equal opportunities. Thank you.

[President Carter]: Well I have tried to express myself as clearly as possible about the common commitments that we have in our two countries and also to spell out as clearly as possible the differences of our two systems of government. My wife and I express this as clearly as we can with our life's work at the Carter Center. We deal with human rights in their totality: peace, democracy, freedom, human rights, environmental quality, the

alleviation of suffering. In my country and as I said in almost all other nations of this hemisphere and the world, governments commit themselves to human rights. I have been able to visit with President Castro and others in recent years...days. Tremendous demonstrations of some of the basic human rights guaranteed to Cuba and to its people. The right to universal health care, the right to education, and as was mentioned by the earlier student speakers, these achievements are notable. And your record equals that of any wealthy nation on earth which has been accomplished under very difficult circumstances. I realize this. What I try to spell out here though, are the other elements of democracy and freedom and we differ, President Castro and I, on the definition of democracy. I read from the Universal Declaration of a definition of Democracy from nations in this hemisphere. The right of every human being to elect freely their own leaders. The right of every human being to speak freely, and without interference or punishment from the government, if those voices express differences or criticism of the government. Their right to organize opposition political parties and to have those confront the incumbent government, the ruling party, and let the people decide which do we prefer. The right of people to form groups that deal with workers or students. The right to form groups that are not approved by the government. For instance, the right of the Catholic Church to have schools as they did have until 1961. Those kinds of rights don't exist in Cuba. Although, in my opinion, having read the constitution they are guaranteed. There is a right to assembly, there is a right to free speech. As long as the assemblies and the people speaking, don't differ publicly or aggressively with the government. So that's what I see as a difference. And I am just repeating what I already said in a very carefully prepared presentation. I think that there will come a time, when changes will be made on both sides of the government should come when the people of Cuba and the of the United States reach out to each other as you have reached out to me in the last few days, and build a foundation for accommodation. I have said in my speech, to repeat myself, that the majority of people in the United States including the majority of people in the US Congress prefer to see unrestricted visitation by American citizens. The majority of American people [unclear] would prefer to see an end to the embargo. There are differences in my country between the people and especially the government that is now incumbent and the government has laid down its terms. And until there are certain changes made in Cuba you will not have the embargo lifted. As you may know from history when I became President, within six weeks I removed all travel restrictions. President Castro and I worked together to try to establish normal diplomatic relations and we made some progress: *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: ...we established the "*Secciones de Interés*"

[President Carter]: Maybe if I would have had another term in office, I would have been more successful, but the people in my country didn't want me to be President another 4 years. *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: ...and another President came. But I don't think there will be another President and I hope that future Presidents will find better methods of making these dreams a reality.

[President Carter]: ... And thank you for your question.

Daniel Garcia, senior chemistry student:

Good Afternoon.

Mr. President, I would like to pose two questions to you, both related to your speech and to the issues you have discussed here at our University.

First, I would like to thank both you and The Carter Center for your efforts to improve the relationship between your people and ours. It is within this context that I would like to ask you what you really think about your country imposing, as a condition for the normalization of our relationship, a change in our government towards democracy, such as that in other Latin American countries. A democracy which is given and taught to us as example, but which is a democracy that for the last 30 or 40 years has taken millions into poverty, has committed the crime of not healing the diseases affecting those people, has killed hundreds of millions of children and has committed fraud and decreased the economic well being of those countries. Those Latin American countries which were the same ones that voted against us or that were not supportive of us in facing the Human Rights Commission. They cannot teach us anything better than what we already have.

So, my question is, whether you consider it right that the condition for the normalization of the relationship between Cuba and the United States to be based upon us making a change in our country towards the democracy seen in Latin American.

And the second question is whether you consider that the United States government has normalized or has had the intention of normalizing their relationship with our country, given the well-known hostility and intensification of the embargo for the past 30 years.

Do you really think that an American administration will allow these ideas to be realized through your efforts?

[President Carter]: I don't have any way to anticipate what will happen to Cuba. That is a decision for the Cuban people concerning the definition of democracy and freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and things of that kind. But I

have been encouraged by the Proyecto Varela, which is an opportunity. I understand, in part, is guaranteed to the people of Cuba from your own constitution. Which says in the two articles that I mentioned, *[President unclear. From interpreter: 63 and 88]* if I remember correctly, that if 10,000 citizens of Cuba, sign a petition asking the National Assembly, to make changes in law, then the National Assembly must consider this. *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: Or at least be debated and that your government should evaluate if it should consider taking it to public vote in order to decide if it should be approved or not. I consider this is an excellent demonstration of the commitment of President Castro and others, who have....

[President Carter]: ...to ordain this constitution for your country. As far as the United States is concerned we have officials, elected directly by the vote of the people, and we submit ourselves to the Presidency every four years. Our constitution limits any President from serving more than 2 terms, which is 8 years. I served 4 years, because of various circumstances, hostages being held in Iran, and economy problems, the American people decided not to grant me a second term. I think we have to realize now that Florida is a very important state, not only in deciding who will be the governor of Florida, and that's the President's brother, but also how Florida will vote, could determine the results of the national elections for President. And in the state of Florida, the Cuban-American community [is] loudly opposed to normalized relations with Cuba, and this is a very important factor. Also there are people not convinced by this political group, who believe sincerely that normal relations between our two countries can only happen ... *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: if Cuba meets the definition of democracy that has been adopted by other countries, we cannot impose this over Cuba. It cannot be forced on Cuba...This has been decided by Cuba, and I presume the Cuban people approve. I don't know that. I don't know that the government of this country will be different.

[President Carter]: As I said earlier I have seen an enormous progress in the areas of health and education that has aroused my intense admiration. Not only because, yesterday afternoon, President Castro and I were meeting in front of six thousand students. Cuba, at your expense, a very poor country has more the 2700 trained medical doctors serving in other countries. There is no other country on earth that can make a claim of that degree of generosity...

President Carter inaudible

[INTERPRETER]: ...but there is a difference in the government of the two countries and this is the cause of this deadlock and I hope there will be change. My hope is that we will see changes. Step by step progress. The United States does something, Cuba responds positively, something else is said and the responsive is positive, and in this manner the countries can normalize their relations. Thank you.

Jose L. Toledo, Dean – Law School:

It is a tribute to justice that you recognize part of the work of our Revolution, which has been built during these long and hard years of work by our people and there are those who have tried to keep it hidden, to misinterpret it and who for 40 years have been working to destroy it. A reflection of this can be seen in the lack of knowledge of the organization that permeates the Cuban State and its operations.

We have frequently heard that in Cuba there are no free elections, when in fact every five years this country celebrates the most free election process, because no one is told what party to vote for, because no citizen is limited in their right to vote, because our President has to be elected by congressmen every 5 years and then, in a second round must be elected again in order for him to be President of the country, and many more things which I could not cover in one session and which is not my goal.

I think it is also necessary, since you have talked of our Constitution, to clarify that legislative initiative is not the same as constitutional reform. The legislative initiative, a right given by the constitution, which was adopted through about 98% of our people exercising their right to vote freely. This right is exercised with strict respect for the Constitution and its laws.

It is not possible to try to use a bill to contradict the legal order of this nation. And the reform, which is provided for in our Constitution and few Constitutions grant this right to their citizens.

This Aula Magna, in which we find ourselves is center of the academic life and location of many of our historical battles, keeps among its most valuable treasures the remains of Felix Varela, priest, one of the patriots who, through his ideas, helped to set the foundations of the Cuban nation and whose legacy is the highest moral standards which are represented by the Cubans as their independence, sovereignty and freedom. And among this legacy is the most valuable for Cubans, which is the one that says that only the Cubans, in total autonomy and originality, should decide on our issues, which was proven when he proclaimed that Cuba should be not only a geographical island but a political one. For this reason, I believe that it is such a great insult to this noble Cuban intellectual, when his name is used to designate a project whose origins, as far as we know, lie among those people in the United States, and whose intentions are to destroy the people's revolutionary work, to

undermine the legal and constitutional government that the Cuban nation has erected in due exercise of their sovereignty.

Something that is inconceivable is to use the legal structure of a country to subvert its basic principles.

With all due respect, and asking that you forgive my previous comment, possibly for its length, and knowing your honesty, and your high ethical standards that you are known for and as well as your experience as a politician, I ask you:

Does the Constitution of the United States of America offer the possibility for a minority group of infamous citizens, fostered by alien influences, to change the founding principles of the American nation? Thank you (Applause).

[President Carter]: It was difficult for me to detect your question but I bet all of the public affairs and one of the rules that I establish for myself with American politics is not to debate the law as a peanut farmer with lawyers. *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: ...and even more so with a Law School Dean in matters that refer to his country and not mine. But allow me to say two things. One is that there is no evidence that the so called Varela Project has been financed in the United States, my opinion is that it is from a small group of Cubans and I don't know how many. The other answer is no, no small group of people can change the Constitution of the US.

[President Carter]: There is only one way that the US Constitution can change, and it is very difficult; it has changed only 24 times in 200 years. This is through 2/3 vote of the House of Representatives and 2/3 vote in the Senate and then 3/4 of the 50 states must also must be in favor. So there is no way to change basic rights. That is, a small group, even one single person has an equal opportunity to express his opinion not only vocally but also in the elections. That amplifies the status of a private citizen so you and I discussed some very basic differences between the governments of our two countries and my hope is as I expressed before that in the future years that there can be better understanding by citizens of the United States of the facts about Cuba and vice versa. And that is a primary reason that I have come to this country that is a generous invitation of your President to learn about your nation to express my admiration and my friendship to the people of Cuba. And to do what I can on this visit and when I return, to remove the obstacles to free visitation, full frayed opportunities, an end of the embargo and complete friendship and normal relations between our countries. That is my purpose in coming here.

Hassan Perez, recently graduated in history and students' representative:

President Carter, I have paid close attention to your words and although I initially had no intention of commenting, as I considered it unnecessary, your reflections have motivated me to share with you some thoughts, using my the virtually illegible notes I managed to take as a basis.

First, I would like to point out an issue that calls for deeper meditation. We tend to talk about the conquests of our revolution in social terms, and in many cases, I believe it is the result of ignorance to try to confine our achievements exclusively to the areas of health, education and sports.

What has been going on in Cuba since 1959 extends far beyond the Olympic champions, university graduates, and world-renowned health specialists. It is much more profound. It has to do with our roots, our identity and with ideas, which are sacred to Cubans. This is especially true for those of us that did not participate in the Sierra, as did our Commander in Chief, President Fidel Castro. For those of us who did not arrive in a boat to fight a tyranny that not too far from here massacred students. This unpunished tyranny flagrantly violated the most elemental rights of students.

I believe this is about a core idea, and that you as a statesman, as an International presence, will surely agree with me on this. The social improvements alone should not be associated with this process because, for all of us, our achievements extend from agricultural processes to the space science research.

I would like to share a story with you. The first Cuban astronaut was a shoe shiner before the Revolution, and from being a shoe shiner, a poor black man from the East Coast, he was able to reach space, thanks to a revolution that made it possible for him to study and graduate. The same applies for all other disciplines, but I will not take more time to elaborate on them. Instead, I refer to some issues you have formulated.

You were wondering if it is possible for our nations to live in peace. I think it is not only possible, but also necessary. All we need is an environment filled with the respect of international brotherhood. However, it is not possible to speak about peace, while maintaining an embargo on a country. It is not possible to have peace while financing terrorist groups – that are allowed to grow and propagate by groups and sectors in power – that are committed to threatening our lives, our children's rights, our young people, and our elders.

The blockade is considered an act of genocide. This is stated in the Geneva Convention and also in Vienna at the end of the 1940's, not just by the Cuban Parliament,

Even in times of war to deprive a country from obtaining food and medications constitutes a criminal act. To live in peace we should first have normal relations.

You stated, "The American government has to take the first step, because it is a powerful nation."

Mr. President, with all due respect, I have a different perspective. I do not believe that the United States has to take the first step because it is a powerful nation. It has to take the first step because Cuba has never blocked the American people, Cuba has never killed a student, nor has Cuba fostered and sponsored someone to place a bomb in Manhattan, or in Washington, or in Pennsylvania, nor elsewhere. Cuba has never launched bacteriological warfare over universities, nor has it planned any policy with those characteristics, but in turn Cuba has suffered from operations of organized crime – sponsored and linked to those circles of power – which have perpetrated terrorist acts, which constitute crimes against humanity.

Thus, I believe that first step should be linked to recognition of that reality.

Private properties that became appropriated by the government were duly paid for. I am not a law student, but since elementary school I have known that with the other governments this is a normal process. It was not the case with those who went to the United States, because they did not want it to happen like that. You also mentioned that in many ways governments have stagnated.

And with even more respect – I beg you to forgive me because I tend to speak quickly, although I know you speak Spanish perfectly – I would like to say to you that it is not that we have stagnated. I believe that from an academic perspective, that phrase should be more precise.

Many American administrations have stagnated because they have not accepted that Cuba changed. The Cuba of the year 2001 is not the same Cuba of the year 1958, and neither is it the same Cuba you first visited 47 years ago. The Cuba of today has been transformed in education, science, sports, and society, into a Cuba with high values in identity, culture, sovereignty, decision-making ability. The Cuba of 1955 did not decide, Mr. Carter; the Cuba of 1955 was not a Republic, it was pseudo-republic and now I am speaking as a student of history.

You were talking about elections and freedom. All this is very quick, before we have the chance to make a question, and we thought: Can we talk about free elections and can we talk about democracy in societies in which more than 50% of citizens would rather prefer to stay home watching television than going to vote, or going to the beach instead of going to vote? The vast majority of presidents all over the world are elected with 32%, 36% or 40% of the votes.

We believe we have the freest elections in the world, and although they are not perfect, to us they are profoundly democratic.

A municipality must elect our Commander-in-chief, as all members of parliament. I am a deputy of the National Assembly, my father is a worker and my mother is housewife. There was no need to pay a penny to be appointed.

You were talking about the freedom of association. We do gather, we have all guarantees to do so and to express our opinions.

I do not want you to feel that we are trying to offend you. My ethical standards and those of my colleagues would not allow me to directly approach you on this issue, but I would like to make a general reflection.

How much does a person wanting to be President of the United States have to pay to become such? Or in any other nation? How much does a Senator have to pay to occupy his seat?

When I saw the young female American student, I wondered if she could make it to the American senate? Does she have 100 million dollars? Does she have 150? Does she have 200?

There have been recent examples on which, even multimillionaires – as you have said – could not reach the White House, and they have not been able to occupy that position of responsibility of that country.

When the Project Varela was mentioned, I felt deeply humiliated. I think it is an infamy and I speak with much respect, I do not intend to offend you, but I have to speak frankly as a young Cuban. I think our history has been manipulated. The ashes of our founder, Felix Varela, lie within the walls of this University of La Havana, and it is an infamy, a calumny, an offense.

For us, those 10,000 signatures – I do not know if there are 10,000 or 9,550, and I do not know who counted them – are the expressions of people swimming in a pool without water, without oxygen, tied to a mafia that wanted a Cuban boy to stay kidnapped illegally in the United States.

And that it is not just a theory, Mr. President. You should understand that even though we are in a university function, for us there are still 3,479 brothers that lost their lives as a result of these terrorists practices and 2,099 who today are a missing hand, a leg, or have some other disability as a result of these acts that were financed by unscrupulous people who are today identified by those projects.

Our elections are genuine free. Anyone who wants to propose something, can attend our district assembly, raise their hand, and speak before the community at large, in the neighborhood, where there are no political parties, as professor Toledo already said.

When you refer to Latin American governments, I think they have the moral right to speak about human rights. Argentina and other countries are palpable recent examples.

I would also say that freedom, quality of life is such that for the baseball game we are about to attend – and that for sure is not starting until you get there, as a mere courtesy – we pay four hundred times less than a major league baseball game to see. And that is within everyone's reach.

This is just an example I remembered, before I tell you that to us, freedom means that when this meeting has ended, there will not be an illegal off-the record execution, nor any death squadrons, because it has not occurred in 40 years. No student will be offered drugs when

he leaves this building. No child will be kidnapped to steal their organs. These are the kind of things we, the new generation, say with passion and with the fervor of our convictions.

I am not talking with fanaticism. We believe culture is universal. We admire the land of Lincoln, the land of Walt Whitman, of Wendell Phillips, of Linus Pauling and so many other contributions the United States has made to the history of ideas, political doctrines, philosophy, and also in science and art. But, with all due respect, I would like to express this to you and tell you that the generation that is here today is open to change. But the change is for that of a more independent nation, with more freedom, more culture, and human fulfillment.

We all have many more questions about what is going on in the Bronx, in Queens, in Boston, and in any other city.

I conclude by posing my question and asking you to forgive me – for it is not everyday that you have the chance to speak with an American president.

It is well known that in the prisons in the United States, which has the largest prison population in the world, with more than two million inmates, they are subject to stabbings, all kind of sexual abuse, and discrimination. But as you have aptly stated, this is not a reflection of the social composition of that country.

We have five brothers, five young people with solid principles and highly educated, who were in the United States to save the Cuban people, the American people and the entire human race from death and terrorism. They are being unjustly held in American prisons, bearing heavy sentences, including life.

The United States has never accepted that it has political detainees, and for us, Gerardo, Rene, Fernando, Antonio and Ramon are political detainees, as was Mumia Abu Jamal, Shaka Sankofa and many others that received the death penalty, including, as you said, children and the mentally ill.

I would like to ask you: Can we, the youngest generation, have hope that the American government – which many times when someone commits a common felony in our country, becomes interested in the case and wants to visit, of which we are aware in our classrooms – performs an act of justice, rectifies, and sets free those five citizens that never endangered the American National security, nor carried out any intelligence work for anyone's secret services, but did nothing more than save the people from death? That is my question and I would again wish you a good stay in our country. This been a great honor for us, the students, to have this discussion with you, and I beg that you forgive me for the extremely long comment, subject to translation, for which I also apologize to the languages interpretation services.

Thank you. (Applause).

[President Carter]: Well I can see that you prefer the system of government here. And you have expressed yourself very thoroughly and I hope that the baseball game will start on time even if the President and I are a little bit late getting there. But we look forward to the next few days of learning even more about

your country. To answer your specific question, which I think I understood, in my country there are three distinct systems of government. One is legislative branch, one is the executive branch that is the president, and one is the judicial branch. The ultimate decisions are made by the judicial branch. *[President Carter inaudible]*

[INTERPRETER]: ...and when an inappropriate or questionable judgment is made and if we find that innocent people have been accused of a crime, they have the right to appeal the decision to a superior court and, as a last resort, to the Supreme Court of The United States. I think it is accurate to say that our system is independent of any pressure that may be exerted from the Legislative and the Executive. I am not aware of the cases you are referring to, but I can assure you that they have the possibility of having a fair trial if they believe the United States has detained them or that they have been unjustly accused or had an erroneous judgment made against them. Anyone has access to the courts. You have eloquently stated the difference and your admiration of your system, but you also criticized my government. In my presentation, I tried to indicate that I, as a private citizen and as someone who occupied the Presidency, I am worried about some of the things that still exist in my country like the size of the prison population, the death penalty, education and health, the problems we had in 2000 elections in Florida. But the fact of the matter is that we have the right to express, alone or in groups, our differences without the risk of punishment by the government. We have the right to organize groups to make changes through a voting process at least every 2 years. I don't know what will be the outcome of the Varela Project that you say disgraces the name of the memory of the Priest but, I think it would be interesting if your officials could publish the work in its entirety and make public all the names that signed the petition. I would love to see in Cuba a referendum to see if the people of Cuba agree or not with it. That if the basis of your Constitution guarantees the free speech, free assembly, then a group of your citizens may present a petition to the National Assembly and submit it to a vote in the National Assembly. This would be a great demonstration to the world, not my definition of democracy, but, in my opinion it would honor the elements of your constitution.

It is a great opportunity for me to do this. I am very grateful to President Castro for giving me the opportunity to come here. When he was asked in the media about the possibility of me coming here, he answered "Mr. Carter may come to my country, he may be in disagreement, he may express what he feels, he may meet with anyone, he may criticize my regime, he may even ask 1 million people into a plaza for this event." Instead I asked him to

have the presentation here and for it to be transmitted over radio and television and he was in agreement with this. This has been a real and vivid demonstration for me that I have been tremendously honored and I am very grateful. I will continue trying to find normalization of our relations and that we progress together not only for our own benefit but also for all others not able to share the blessings that you and I have.

Juan Vela Valdes' closing remarks: Thank you very much President Carter. On behalf of the academic community, I would like to present you the Medal of the University of La Havana, as a gift for you to remember our country, and also a book entitled Honoris Causa, where every Honoris Causa doctorate is mentioned from 1926 to 1996. By the way, there are many Americans with Honoris Causa doctorates from the University of La Havana (Applause).

I would like to thank Mr. Carter for being here as well as our comrade, Fidel for presiding over this ceremony. And to all the student body and faculty I thank you for your attendance.

Thank you. (Applause).