

**(unofficial translation)**

**Message from Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas to the National Endowment for Democracy's  
2009 Democracy Award  
June 24, 2009**

Dear friends, Representatives of the people of the United States of America,

Much is said about relations between my country and yours. This is not the topic of today's ceremony, but it is indeed the sub-text of today's event. For this reason, I chose this topic to begin with, and I chose only two words to define the desired relationship and to proclaim goodwill between our people – we want freedom, and friendship.

These words cannot be contaminated – neither by suspicion, nor by manipulations – because they express the vocation that God sows in all human beings when he creates us blessed with liberty and in fraternity with each other.

Thank you for this gesture of solidarity that recognizes the bravery and devotion to the cause of justice and liberty of these Cuban brothers and sisters of ours: Iris and Jorge Luis, and the prisoners of conscience Iván, Librado and José Daniel.

This last term – prisoner of conscience – is our expression of admiration and gratitude for those who will not be able to participate in – and not even listen to – what is said here, because they have given their voice, their health and the best days of their lives for their fellow citizens, Cubans, who today are not free.

They struggle so that, one day, all will have their own voice and be able to live without fear and without the oppression of totalitarianism that consumes their days.

I could speak of all of these [honorees.] I could speak of a brother, José Daniel Ferrer García, one of the leaders of the Christian Liberation Movement who has dedicated himself to this just cause since his early youth. But for this same reason I can, should, and have the honor and pleasure to speak about all of the Cuban prisoners of conscience.

Why are they imprisoned? For peacefully defending and promoting the rights of all Cubans; for fearlessly denouncing violations of these rights; and for writing and speaking the truth, which in Cuba is itself imprisoned. The prisoners of conscience in Cuba were convicted based on false premises – accused of working for your government, when in fact they were only working so that Cubans could freely choose their own democratic government.

They were convicted on false charges, accused of threatening our national independence -- when they and we dedicate our lives to fight for sovereignty and national independence, but with the conviction that, to be real, sovereignty and national independence are inseparable from freedom and from the rights of all citizens.

In today's world, many regimes establish and then sustain themselves in the name of defending the sovereignty of the people. Meanwhile, they take away their citizens' freedom; they silence them, and leave them without a voice and without a real opportunity to exercise their sovereign right to determine their own destiny. We, the Cuban people, are not confused by this. We want to be – and always will be – an independent country, and we do not wish to live any other way. But we also do not know how to – nor can we, nor do we want to – live without freedom. We never chose this regime that oppresses us and leaves us without rights.

Despite efforts by the Cuban government and others to silence this fact, everyone knows that the mass imprisonments of March 2003 were meant to eliminate the Varela Project, which opened the path for the Cuban people to claim their rights. We cannot allow this cause – for which many of them were imprisoned – to be forgotten or silenced; this would only serve to forget the cause of freedom for Cubans.

We will not abandon the Varela Project because Cubans still do not have their fundamental rights, and because many, inside and outside of Cuba, are struggling peacefully to hold high that torch of hope and determination.

Meanwhile, the Cuban government, and others with power outside of Cuba, wish to silence and discredit this campaign for the rights of all Cubans. But we continue – and will continue forward – because Cubans should be and deserve to be free, as with all the people of the world.

No tyrannical power, nor group of powers, can make us abandon this path. To do so would be to forget José Daniel and all our brothers and sisters in prison. To do so would be to forget our own people who are now without freedom, and we will not forget them, like the Hebrew people in captivity never forgot Jerusalem.

If you wish to support our people, support with your voice and with your heart the path of peace and reconciliation that leads us unmistakably to freedom and to the rights that we Cubans want for ourselves.

Thank you, dear friends.

Oswaldo José Payá Sardiñas  
In the name of the Christian Liberation Movement  
Havana, Cuba, June 23, 2009