

President Raúl Castro Says Cuba “Will Remain Free, Sovereign and Independent”



Havana, December 22 (RHC)-- President Raul Castro delivered on Thursday the closing remarks of the 10th ordinary session of the 8th Legislature of the National Assembly of People's Power -- Cuba's Parliament.

In his speech, the Cuban leader covered issues of national and international interest, beginning with the severe damage inflicted by hurricane Irma in September in vast territories of the island. It is estimated that the damage was worth the equivalent of 13.2 billion pesos.

“However, not one citizen was left homeless. The revolutionary government adopted a host of measures to provide building materials and basic consumer goods to the victims. We managed to preserve education and health services, ensuring epidemiological stability,” he said.

President Raúl Castro said that there are several programs underway for the construction of more solid and resistant housing in the communities that suffered the greatest impact. “Those programs will remain as one of the main priorities in the

National Economy Plan for next year and beyond,” he stated.

In his remarks, the Cuban leader made reference to the recently held municipal elections, which he noted had greater preparation and organization than those held 2 and a half years ago.

“In fact, the polls were a demonstration of the Cuban people's massive support and confidence in the Revolution and its socialist democracy, as well as a worthy tribute to its historical leader, and we expect this trend to be the same during the next stage of the general elections that will soon be convened.”

Raul Castro acknowledged the island's 1.6% GDP growth in 2017, obtained despite the adverse international financial circumstances, the insufficient availability of fuel, the occurrence of natural disasters and the effects of the US economic blockade.

Regarding Cuba's foreign debt, he reiterated Cuba's firm intention to continue recovering gradually the international credibility of the country's economy. "I take this opportunity to convey to our creditors the willingness of our government to fulfill the commitments it has made in the different processes of reordering the external debt," he said.

Addressing deputies to the National Assembly of People's Power, President Raúl Castro also covered Cuba's current dual currency system.

"This period has witnessed an intensification of the efforts towards currency unification. We want to accomplish this goal, while simultaneously overcoming existing distortions in the areas of subsidies, prices and wholesale and retail rates and, likewise in the pensions and salaries of the state sector of the economy," he charged.

Speaking about Cuba's foreign policy, Raul Castro made reference to the deterioration of relations between the Cuba and the United States.

"Our country is not at all responsible for the current setback in bilateral ties," he said, stressing that Cuba is willing to continue negotiating pending bilateral issues with the United States, based on equality and full respect for Cuba's sovereignty and independence.

"The Cuban Revolution has withstood the aggressiveness of 11 consecutive US administrations and here we are and here we will remain: free, sovereign and independent."

At the end of his address to the Cuban unicameral parliament on Thursday, the Cuban leader reiterated his concept that the mandate of the country's top leaders should be limited to two five-year terms.

"Consequently, when the new National Assembly is formed on April 19, my second and last term as the head of state and government will be over. Cuba will get a new leader."

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