

A relationship marked by transcendental events

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By María Josefina Arce

Colombia is the guest of honor at the Havana International Book Fair, an opportunity to strengthen existing ties with Cuba, a path that has been traced since the arrival last August to the presidency of Gustavo Petro.

The Colombian delegation is headed by Vice President Francia Márquez Mina, which speaks of the importance that the current Colombian government attaches to its relationship with the Caribbean island.

Márquez Mina is taking advantage of her stay in the Cuban capital to make a working visit, which includes meetings with Cuban authorities to discuss the prospects of expanding bilateral ties.

Her priority is also to learn more about Cuba's relations with African nations, since as vice-president she is in charge of leading the Africa-Caribbean strategy.

The ties between Havana and Bogota are marked by important events. Cuba played an essential role, as a guarantor country, in the talks between the government of then President Juan Manuel Santos and the once guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army, which culminated in the signing in 2016 of the Peace Agreement.

And as a contribution to that peace, the archipelago granted scholarships to victims of the armed conflict and former guerrillas to study at the Latin American School of Medicine, so that upon their return to Colombian territory they could help the most vulnerable communities.

Bogota has also demonstrated these special ties. For the victims of Hurricane Ian, which devastated the western Cuban province of Pinar del Río last September, it donated 142 tons of supplies, such as water tanks, kitchen kits and construction materials.

Even more valuable was his donation of human skin to contribute to the recovery of patients injured in the accident at the supertanker base in Matanzas, which occurred in August 2022.

Likewise, President Gustavo Petro has demanded that Cuba be excluded from the arbitrary list of countries allegedly sponsoring terrorism. A request he reiterated during the visit of Anthony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, to Colombia last October.

On the cultural level, the relationship is more than close. The Nobel Prize for Literature, the Colombian Gabriel García Márquez, contributed to the creation in 1986 of the International Film and Television School of San Antonio de los Baños.

Also decisive was the support of this great friend of the Cuban people to the Festival of New Latin American Cinema of Havana, which every year brings together in the Cuban capital people linked to the seventh art in the region and other parts of the world.

Cuba and Colombia aspire to strengthen their already historic ties for the benefit of the development of both peoples, a priority of both governments.

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