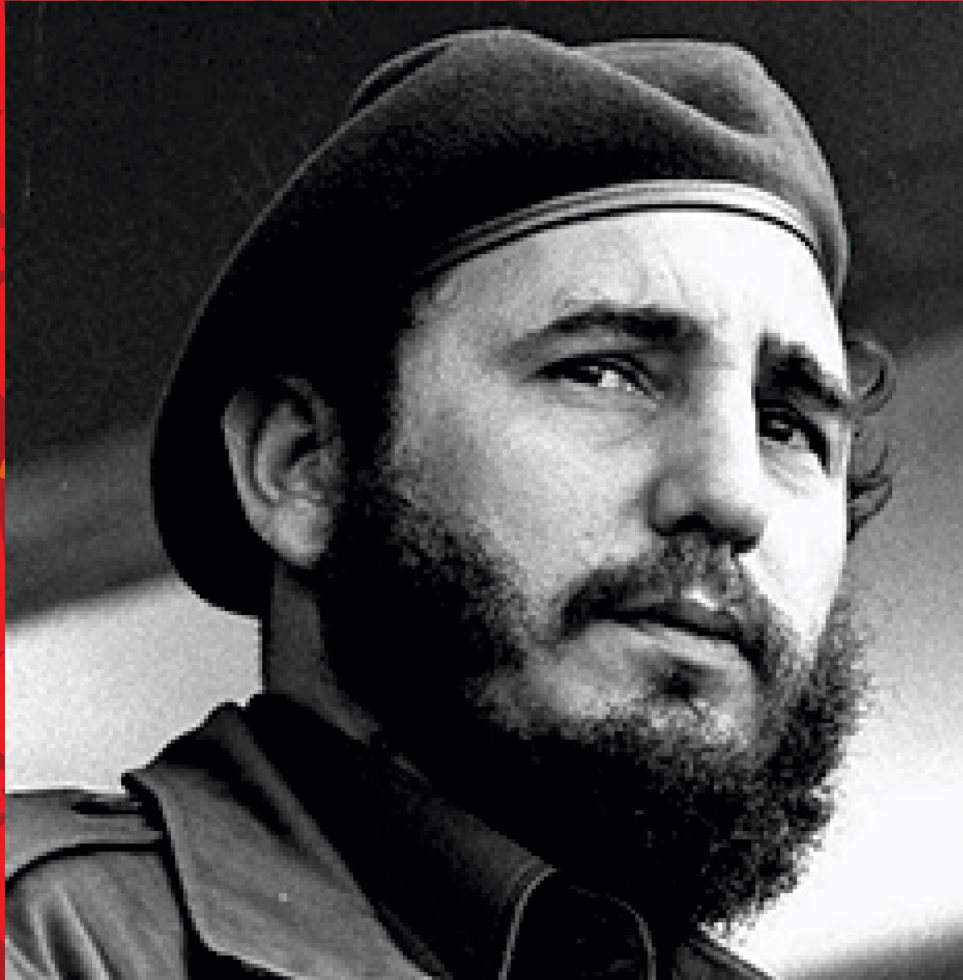




Bua Komanisi!

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SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST PARTY



Cde Fidel Castro Ruz
1926 – 2016

**Unity of the ANC and of our Alliance, the Best Tribute
to Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution**



Unity of the ANC and of our Alliance, the best tribute to Comrade Fidel Castro

By Comrade Blade Nzimande, SACP General Secretary
on behalf of the 13th Congress Central Committee
of the South African Communist Party

Friday 25 November 2016 will go down in human history as the day the world lost one of its greatest leaders. The leader and Commander-in-Chief of the Cuban Revolution, former President of Cuba and First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, Comrade Fidel Castro Ruz, passed away on that day, at the age of 90. Comrade Fidel, as he was fondly addressed in Cuba, belonged to the rarest breed of finest revolutionaries. He made an invaluable contribution in the struggle for the emancipation of humanity. The bourgeoisie hated him, precisely because he firmly fought for an end to their exploitative and oppressive capitalist and imperialist system. This prize is the fate of a true revolutionary – a true revolutionary cannot be liked by the exploiters of the working class, the oppressors of the people, counter-revolutionaries, reactionaries and charlatans. Comrade Fidel was a communist par excellence. To the end he fought for the overthrow of foreign domination, capitalism and imperialism.

The SACP dips its red flag in honour of Comrade Fidel, a communist till the end!

The South African Communist Party dips the red flag to mourn this gallant revolutionary, undoubtedly one of the greatest revolutionaries human society has ever produced. In particular, Comrade Fidel supported many national liberation struggles, including the all-important struggle to realise and defend Cuba's national sovereignty and that of other nations. Comrade Fidel understood that a progressive struggle to safeguard national sovereignty is a strong antidote to imperialist expansionist ambitions, and yet it is another important platform to forge principled internationalist solidarity.

It was with deep sorrow to receive the sad news that Comrade Fidel passed away. At the same time Comrade Fidel's passing away must start a process of celebrating his life and role in the struggle to serve humanity. Indeed the Cuban Revolution has not been of the Cuban people alone, but has inspired millions in Latin America, Africa and the world over. It is for this reason that Cuba has for decades enjoyed worldwide solidarity against the illegal economic blockade imposed by the United States.

The SACP forged strong links with the Communist Party of Cuba during Comrade Fidel's leadership. Many SACP cadres studied and trained in Cuba during the darkest day, apartheid repression. These fraternal relations were strengthened and continued to this day. Even when Cuba was going through one of the most trying times, the difficulties brought by the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Cuba never shirked from its internationalist commitments. My first visit to Cuba was during this time. I vividly recall the electricity cuts and food rationing, amongst others, but through the leadership of Comrade Fidel and the Communist Party of Cuba the country managed to get out of that situation whilst continuing to send its doctors to many parts of the world.

Fidel, a fighter for social and economic justice, a vanguard in the struggle for socialism:

Comrade Fidel will be remembered for the success of the Cuban Revolution in lifting the quality of life of the people with meagre resources that have, for over half-a-century, been heartlessly squeezed under imperialist onslaught and pressure directed mainly but not exclusively from the United States (U.S).

For example, Cuba outdoes the U.S. in education areas such as government spending on education as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product in which area Cuba is ranked 1st and the U.S 39th; children out of school – primary, per 1000; pupil to teacher ratio – secondary school; college and university gender parity index; college and university share of total education spending. In Cuba, healthcare is universal. In the U.S it is not. Cuba has a high ranking life expectancy rate at birth, by far surpassing many countries. These are some of the fruits of the relentless struggle that was led by Comrade Fidel to overthrow the dictatorship of the U.S-backed Fulgencio Batista.

Before then, the labour of the people of Cuba, their basic resources and wealth, were exploited by and to the benefit mainly of U.S imperialist capital. Only an elitist group and its patronage networks both created as a buffer between the exploited majority and the exploiters wallowed in the crumbs that fell from the tables of imperialist economic control. This was to become the base of counter-revolutionary elements against the Cuban Revolution, against the Cuban people.

For the liberation and independence of the African continent; a principled, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist vanguard cadre:

Comrade Fidel will be remembered also for offering unconditional international solidarity support to the struggles of the peoples of the world. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban volunteers worked under his brilliant leadership and fought in 17 countries in our African continental independence struggles.

Cuba's support in our continent did not end there. It continues to this day. During the recent outbreak of the Ebola virus, Cuba, a small island, had the largest contingent of healthcare workers to combat the deadly contagion. None of the so-called developing countries, which by the way amassed that status by under-developing our continent, Latin America and others, could match Cuba's role in this regard.

In our own country South Africa, Comrade Fidel will best be remembered by all democratic and peace loving people for his deployment, from 1976 to 1988, of 60 000 Cuban troops in Angola to fight alongside the People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola. It was this solidarity effort that stopped and, at the historic battle of Cuito Cuanavale, pushed back and defeated apartheid South Africa's Western-backed forces. The apartheid regime's defence force was thereafter forced also to withdraw from Namibia. These two historic events directly led to the independence of Namibia on 21 March 1990 and laid a strong foundation for the realisation of our own April 1994 Democratic Breakthrough.

Cuba's support to our national democratic revolution did not end there. The Cuban Revolution continues to support our struggle for democratic transformation and development. As part of this support, South Africa is proudly a beneficiary of many Cuban doctors who are looking after the healthcare needs of our people, including in remote rural areas where there are either few or no South African doctors. Cuba is host to 3 000 South African student doctors, twice the number of doctors who graduate in South Africa every year.

Selfless, not even a discrete particle of soil, not even a cent to Cuba: An important distinguishing feature initiated by Comrade Fidel in Cuba's international solidarity work!

Everywhere Cuba offered support – it never took away anything, not even a discrete particle of soil, not even a cent, except the remains of their casualties where any occurred, such as in Angola during the defeat of the forces of apartheid South Africa. Compare this to the looting of our continental resources by the under-developers, colonisers and imperialists, the U.S and its European allies!

Yet they, especially the U.S spoke ill of Comrade Fidel and even labelled him a dictator. How could a dictator be overwhelmingly so much loved and defended in his own country and revered by millions of the oppressed and the exploited across the world? The U.S is the actual dictator and for that matter an imperialist regime!

Fidel, a fierce defender of Cuban independence and its chosen socialist path!

In spite of their large amounts of efforts in fabricating volumes of propaganda smearing Comrade Fidel by misinformation, the successive U.S imperialist regimes actually recognised that he did not fight as a lone man in the struggle. He inspired workers, peasants, students and other strata to fight against economic exploitation and imperialist domination, and to forge ahead with socialist construction and defence of the Cuban Revolution. The misinformation by the U.S and its allies did not succeed to turn the people and pit them against Comrade Fidel and the Communist Party of Cuba. Only a minority, as it would happen in many cases, either bought into that propaganda or were bought to propagate it.

A resilient, highly trained and well-experienced strategic and tactical fighter:

Comrade Fidel not only survived many assassination plots. Each time he emerged more than ever resolute as an immensely popular and revered leader in the worldwide anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, movement for liberation and universal human emancipation. For example he survived over 638 assassination attempts directed mainly by U.S imperialism with its sky high military spending, more than that of any nation on earth and in many cases by far surpassing spending on the social needs of many countries of the world: Yet the U.S, under its imperialist dictatorship of the world and its policy regime of neoliberalism, demanded and in many cases succeeded to force oppressed nations to cut social spending.

According to a 351-page report of the U.S's own Senate *Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities* entitled "Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders", "United States leaders, including most Members of Congress, called for vigorous action to stem the Communist infection in this hemisphere". According to the report, it was policy to "get rid of Castro". The U.S Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Richard Helms is quoted in the report saying the pressure "intensified during the period of Operation MONGOOSE and continued through much of 1963". Operation Mongoose was a covert operation of the CIA developed during the first year of U.S President John F. Kennedy's administration. Helms is further quoted in the report as saying as the pressure "to get rid of Castro" increased, "obviously the extent of the means that one thought were available ... increased too".

The U.S intensified its propaganda of misinformation about Comrade Fidel as the pressure to get rid of him intensified. Uncritical consumers of U.S propaganda, including in South Africa, simply regurgitated the fabrications. For those who do not see the bigger picture, the position adopted by the U.S. was only against Fidel as an individual leader. The reality, on the contrary, is that this system of antagonism went beyond the person of Comrade Fidel, Cuba and the Western Hemisphere – which the U.S regarded as its own backyard for exploitation and domination.

The sin committed by the Cuban people under the leadership of Fidel was to fight for national independence and control of their country's resources, labour and its proceeds.

The hostility by the U.S was and remains wider. To this day the U.S continues to apply to the rest of humanity, especially those of us who stand on the side of democratic national sovereignty and control of our own resources, labour and its proceeds. This is why the U.S labelled as terrorists, our own leaders such as Comrade Nelson Mandela and many others. The U.S. maintained this classification well beyond our 1994 democratic breakthrough.

The Cuban Revolution, since its victory on 1 January 1959 has experienced relentless counter-revolutionary, including terrorist, attacks. The U.S-backed Bay of Pigs invasion was defeated in April 1961. This was a CIA sponsored attempted military coup to overthrow Cde Fidel and defeat the Cuban Revolution.

One of the brutal terrorist attacks against Cuba was made on 6 October 1976 when Cubana de Aviación Flight 455 from Barbados to Jamaica was bombed, killing all 73 people on board the Douglas DC-8 aircraft.

The U.S imperialist aggression against Cuba was multifaceted. It involved an economic warfare including the now more than half-a-century illegal economic blockade of Cuba and the occupation of the Guantanamo Bay – which the U.S has since been using as its centre of human rights atrocities.

The real cost of the illegal U.S economic blockade on Cuba is yet to be conclusively calculated – including all the economic and social consequences of the atrocious pushback against Cuban national development.

In memory of Fidel we will deepen our solidarity with Cuba!

On behalf of the SACP I want to reiterate our Party's just call to the U.S to lift its illegal economic blockade of Cuba unconditionally. The SACP also calls for the U.S to evacuate and handover Guantanamo Bay to the Cubans, as it is part of Cuba.

To Donald Trump, the man who stands to become the next president of the U.S:

The SACP says, Sir, there is still time, before your inauguration, to discard what we would call your Trumpishness – that is, your recklessly harsh and often racist utterances and uncaring attitude towards the circumstances of others especially against Cuba, Mexicans, women, Muslims, and Africans and Diaspora.

As the SACP, we will stand with Cuba in support of its just struggles and choices to pursue the humane; socialist path of development.

The SACP also takes this opportunity to salute the people of Cuba for their courage and resoluteness in defence of their motherland. We also salute the workers and poor of the world and all progressive movements and parties for having stood firm in solidarity with the Cuban revolution. The best way to preserve the memory of Comrade Fidel is to intensify this solidarity: **Always, until all forms of aggression against Cuba and its people are defeated.**

In our country, we will honour the memory of Comrade Fidel by intensifying our struggle for socialism under our strategic and programmatic slogan:

Socialism is the future, build it now!

This means intensifying the immediate struggle to drive a second, more radical phase of our democratic transition. It means intensifying the fight against monopoly capital, corporate capture and the parasitic bourgeoisie, and relentlessly fighting corruption wherever it occurs. It means building a broad popular front of working class and the people to strengthen our movement and realise the goals of our revolution.

One of Cde Fidel's early successes that had a lasting impact on the course of the Cuban revolution was the merger between the earlier Cuban Communist Party, the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) with the July 26 movement founded by Comrade Fidel in 1953. This merger led to the formation of the current Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) – the Communist Party of Cuba in 1965, with Comrade Fidel as its founding First Secretary. It has been the unity of the Communist Party of Cuba that has guaranteed the success and advances of the Cuban Revolution.

Unity, the best tribute!

The unity of the Cuban Communist Party and the Cuban movement must be a lesson for us as the national liberation movement in South Africa as we bid farewell to Comrade Fidel. It is only united movements that are able to make decisive revolutionary advances. Divided movements can only lead to serious setbacks and even defeat of the revolution. The ANC in particular and the Alliance as a whole need to take this lesson to heart, especially during this period when our revolution, as well as the unity of the movement, is seriously at stake.

Let us not only honour Comrade Fidel through speeches and written articles, but let us honour him by acting to unite ourselves and set aside any factionalist interests that can only lead to the destruction of our movement.

I cannot resist ending this tribute by mentioning some of the instances where, on behalf of the SACP, I had had the privilege to listen to and meet with Comrade Fidel personally.

Adios Comrade Fidel: On a personal note

By Comrade Blade Nzimande, SACP General Secretary

In the 1990s I had the privilege of being delegated by the SACP to Cuba. Sometime in the mid-1990s I represented the SACP at the Latin American Left platform called the São Paulo Forum, attended by many leaders from left political parties and movements. Comrade Fidel addressed the Forum, which was held at the Havana Convention Centre. I remember very well in his off the cuff remarks Comrade Fidel admonishing the Sandinista leader Comrade Daniel Ortega who was in attendance that he was worried Ortega was too relaxed and the imperialists were going to kill him as they feared the Sandinistas might return to power. Indeed the Sandinistas came back with Ortega as President of Nicaragua.

In one of my other visits to Cuba I had an opportunity to listen again to Cde Fidel addressing a gathering at the Karl Marx Theatre in Havana. He spoke for five hours without a speech, which became his trademark! But I only had an occasion to personally interact with Comrade Fidel on his visits to South Africa. He had a state visit in 1998 and had the pleasure to be amongst the Members of Parliament who listened to him on that occasion.

I was also amongst the comrades who accompanied him to tour Robben Island. I remember the shock on his face when he saw Comrade Mandela's prison cell, asking the same question most people ask when they see that cell, as to how such a tall person as Madiba could fit into such a small size of a cell. When Madiba and Fidel met again in September 2001 in Madiba's house at Houghton in Johannesburg, I remember very well Comrade Fidel asking Madiba this same question. I could see the sense of shock when looking into that cell, but I was at the same time sensing some relief on his part that because of, amongst others, the victory of the Cuban and Angolan forces in Cuito Cuanavale, Robben Island was no longer a prison but a museum symbolising the victory of progressive forces over the forces of evil!

I was truly honoured for Comrade Madiba to invite me to the meeting of September 2001, mentioned above. This was a private meeting between Madiba and Fidel at his Houghton home as Comrade Fidel had attended an international gathering in South Africa.

On inviting me over the phone, Comrade Madiba joked that he was not feeling safe to meet a leading Cuban Communist on his own, so I better join him so that in case of danger his own fellow Communist could protect him.

Were this true I do not know how I was going to do that because I noticed that day that both these tall men were of the same height! Where would I have fitted in that equation!?! But on arriving at Madiba's house he changed the story and said to me and Fidel that he invited me because he wanted to show Comrade Fidel that it was not only Cuba that had Communists but South Africa too! I really enjoyed that conversation between these two giants which lasted for over an hour!

I remember they also exchanged their respective experiences about prison, although Comrade Fidel quickly requested Madiba to speak more about that subject as he had more experience since he spent 27 years in prison! Fidel said his story of prison had faded compared to that of Comrade Nelson as he only spent two years in Batista's prison between 1953 and 1955.

A humble person indeed!

To *El Comandante*, our dearest Comrade Fidel we say: ¡Hasta la victoria siempre! Always, until victory!

Guard Against Counterfeit Anti-Imperialism:

A tribute to Fidel Castro, a heroic revolutionary, an exemplary humanist

By Cde Jeremy Cronin, SACP Second Deputy General Secretary

In 1945 a bloody first half of the 20th century drew to a close. With end of the 2nd World War, at a global scale, a relative stale-mate was now established between the Western imperialist powers under the dominance of the United States and an emergent socialist bloc of countries. The first half of the 20th century had seen two catastrophic world wars, with much of the bloodshed in Europe.

Now the epicentre of the struggle for human justice, democracy and national self-determination shifted to the geo-political South. Europe had been liberated from fascism, racism and occupation, but throughout the geo-political South their close cousins were alive - various toxic versions of colonialism, neo-colonialism, settler colonialism, semi-colonialism, apartheid colonialism. Everywhere these oppressive realities were accompanied by rabid racism.

In was in this context that in the late 1940s and into the 1950s a new generation of popular, dynamic and fearless revolutionary leaders emerged. Some were to die relatively young, Che Guevara, Patrice Lumumba, martyrs in struggle. Others survived into the late 20th century. Some of these had however lost their revolutionary vigour. But there were outstanding exceptions, those who survived, with their authority, humanism and reputation intact and enhanced – among them Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela.

Both were born into relatively privileged families but in the midst of deep rural poverty and under the scourge of oppressive regimes. In the case of Cuba, the island was a neo-colony of the United States with supine and corrupt comprador local leaders. Havana had been turned into a brothel, a casino playground of the Mafia, while the majority of Cubans were pressed into back-breaking work in US-owned sugar and tobacco plantations.

As a law student in Havana, Fidel moved increasingly in radical left circles. In July 1953 he first came to national prominence when he and a small group of fellow radicals launched an armed attack on the Moncada military barracks. The attack was defeated. Some were killed and others, including Fidel, were captured. But the event served to galvanize a rising tide of opposition to the corrupt Batista regime. In particular it was the young Fidel's rousing speech from the dock – "History will absolve me".

A year later Fidel was released on amnesty and went into exile. With his brother Raul he teamed up with other Latin American radicals, including the Argentinean Che Guevara. They formed the July 26 movement and planned an armed liberation struggle back in Cuba. In November 1956, in a rickety boat, the Granma, 81 armed revolutionaries set sail from the coast of Mexico bound for Cuba. The trip was planned to take five days. Through their underground contacts back in Cuba they had organised for diversionary attacks to occur away from the selected landing destination. These duly occurred but the boat was in such poor condition that the trip took seven days, by which time their own plans had been uncovered and they were ambushed on landing.

Once the survivors had regrouped in the Sierra Maestra it was found that only 19 of the 81 had survived, these included Fidel and Che. They were to become the core of a liberation struggle in the Sierra Maestra. With support from left wing parties and trade unions in the towns and cities, working with the rural poor and winning over deserting government soldiers, in a remarkably short time the revolutionary movement swept through the island, arriving in Havana on January 1, 1959. The dictator Batista fled to the US with suitcases stuffed with millions of stolen dollars. In February Fidel was sworn in as Prime Minister and a series of radical reforms were quickly enacted. A cap on land-holding was placed at 402 hectares. Foreign ownership of Cuban land was prohibited. 200,000 peasants received title deeds. A mass literacy campaign was launched with college and university students suspending their studies for a year and selflessly going out into the deep rural areas. Health-care was nationalised.

Of course the reaction from Cuba's US neighbour just 90 kilometres away was soon in coming. Oil exports were cut back. When Cuba imported oil from the Soviet Union, the Shell, Esso and Standard Oil refineries refused to refine the product. Fidel's response was decisive – he nationalised the refineries. The US then cut Cuba's sugar export quota. Again the response was patriotic and decisive – the US-owned sugar mills were nationalised along with US banks.

But Fidel Castro understood that the US would not be content simply to destabilise the Cuban revolution through economic and financial means, especially as they were not working. The Cuban army was doubled in size. More importantly in September 1960 a People's Militia, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), was established. These were street and block committees, provided with basic military training but also responsible for community work, like home-based care visits.

They were genuine organs of localised popular power, and indeed popular democracy. The enemies of Cuba argue that there is “no democracy” in Cuba. But what is more democratic – local popular power, or the oligopoly-driven two-party dominated US presidential elections?

By 1970 one-third of Cuba's population was involved voluntarily in CDRs. And this was to be the popular bedrock, the decisive factor in the very survival of the Cuban revolution, enabling Fidel to outlast ten US presidents and 637 assassination attempts.

In April 1961 the US launched the Bay of Pigs invasion, using Cuban exile proxies trained and armed by the CIA. With a US fleet steaming off the coastline, and aircraft bombing Cuban infrastructure, a mass beach-landing was undertaken. It was routed in a matter of days, with Fidel himself leading at the front. He later said: “what the imperialists cannot forgive us is that we made a socialist revolution under their noses”.

On the basis of these advances and the defence of the revolution in the face of a blockade (that still continues) Cuba has made amazing and universally acclaimed social advances – in literacy, in health-care (with infant mortality rates way below the US), and in technology (Cuba is a world-leader in bio-technology, for instance).

Internationalism

Fidel was always a proud patriot, but, like the revolution he led, he was also imbued with a deep sense of internationalism. As he once put it, the imperialists “don't understand...that our country is not just Cuba; our country is also humanity.”

These were not just words. Over the decades Cuba has selflessly deployed hundreds of thousands of doctors, engineers, soldiers to the Middle East, Latin America, and indeed Africa. What is especially remarkable about these deployments is that the Cubans have never asked for one cent in compensation. They have never sought for mining concessions in foreign countries, or for a slice of the business action in countries that they have literally saved from devastation. In many of these countries thousands of Cubans lost their lives.

As Southern Africans we should honour this and know this better than most.

Soon after Angolan independence, the CIA working out of Mobutu's Zaire and the apartheid regime with its bases in Namibia/SWA planned a joint pincer movement to capture Luanda and defeat the MPLA government. In 1975 Savimbi's UNITA backed by apartheid SA, and Roberto Holden's FNLA backed by the CIA were on the outskirts of Luanda. It was the dramatic arrival of 18,000 Cuban troops airlifted and shipped in at the eleventh hour that saved the day.

In 1987 an even more decisive battle occurred in southern Angola at Cuito Cuanavale. In the dry season of that year Angolan government forces had advanced on Savimbi's Jamba headquarters, but they had overstretched their supply lines and the apartheid regime had been waiting for this moment to launch a lightning motorised attack with the aim of definitively defeating the Angolan forces.

This plan nearly succeeded, it was only frustrated by the technical capacity of the Cuban forces to rapidly build advanced airfields. The Cuban-piloted Soviet MIG jet fighters outmatched the apartheid Mirage fighters and suddenly the balance of conventional armed capacity had shifted in southern African. The apartheid invasion forces no longer had air superiority and they were forced to beat a hasty retreat back over the Namibian border.

In 1988 the New York Accords forced the apartheid forces to leave Namibia and in 1990 Namibian independence occurred. Our own negotiated transition commenced in the same year. As Fidel once said: “The history of Africa will be written as before and after Cuito Cuanavale.”

The Special Period: 1990 – 2000

But these advances in southern Africa were to coincide with a dramatic global development, the collapse of the Soviet bloc of countries. Suddenly Cuba, after three decades under a US-imposed blockade found itself deprived of its one life-line. It couldn't import oil. Its own sugar exports collapsed. By 1992 the economy had declined by 40%.

The response of Fidel and the Cuban people was typical. It was not to surrender themselves into the hands of the IMF. It was not to abandon ship. This island of 11 million people, faced with isolation, embarked on an heroic program of sovereign self-sufficiency. They moved away from the old neo-colonial dependence on mono-cropping (sugar and tobacco). They moved away from large energy-intensive state and cooperative farms, to smaller farms. They even replaced tractors with oxen and found that the latter were better for soil conservation. Deprived of access to extensive industrial fertilizers they adopted widespread vermiculture. Important advances were made in localised solar energy resources.

By 2006 Cuba was the world's only nation which met the UNDP's definition of sustainable development, sustainably putting back into nature what it was taking out.

Typically, Fidel understood the wider human and international implications in this new direction forced upon the island. Cuba's energy and sustainability challenges, he said, were a forerunner of a global challenge. As he never tired of arguing in the last decades, if the entire world's population was to consume at the level of the average North American, then we would need seven planet earths. The path of profit-driven, capitalist growth underpinned by imperialist aggression is simply unsustainable. It is, in fact, a crime against nature, and, since we are part of nature, it is a crime against humanity.

Lessons for post-apartheid South Africa

Bound inextricably together by the ties of a common struggle, by the blood of Cuban doctors and MK soldiers in Angola spilt by the apartheid regime, bound by the mutual admiration and respect that our two great leaders Fidel and Madiba felt for each other – it is nonetheless important to recognise that Cuba and South Africa are different countries. As the Cubans have never tired of reminding us, Cuba of 1959 and South Africa of 1994 represented different realities and in different global contexts. The Cubans never tried to export their revolution to South Africa as a singular model to be replicated here.

Nevertheless, there are many important lessons we can learn from the steadfast example of Fidel and the courageous Cuban people, not least at a time when it is obvious that our own national democratic revolution is going through a complicated period.

Here, briefly, are three issues that deserve consideration within our own reality.

One, the Cuban revolution, living and surviving literally under the nose of the most powerful imperialist state, always understood the critical importance of popular protagonism, of popular power, and of revolutionary morality. These were qualities once well understood within our own liberation struggle, not least during the 1980s when rudimentary organs of popular power emerged in townships and rural villages as the semi-insurrectionary struggles against apartheid grew. Post-1994 we have tended to demobilise popular forces (except during electoral campaigns) and preferred to conduct ourselves as a delivery state. The Cuban revolution would not have survived for one year if the same mistake had been made there.

Two, leadership is critical and Fidel (like Madiba and Chris Hani) exemplified this admirably. Fidel was always in the frontline of struggle, in the Sierra Maestra, at the Bay of Pigs, in the economic struggle for survival. In the late 1960s Cuba's sugar harvest was threatened. Fidel personally led the campaign to ensure targets were met. When, in 1969, the target was not met, Fidel offered his resignation. He took personal responsibility and did not displace it onto a collective. This was not to be the first or last time that he offered to resign.

Three:

We must guard against counterfeit anti-imperialism.

The Cuban revolution was, it had to be, anti-imperialist. Here in South Africa within our movement we sometimes find a degenerate, counterfeit “anti-imperialism”, reactionary attitudes and behaviours masquerading as “anti-imperialist”, “anti-monopoly” capital. During the terrible AIDs-denialism period, led by some within our movement, we were told that AIDS was “just an imperialist plot”. Nowadays, the struggle against corporate capture of key parts of the state are said to be part of an “imperialist agenda”. When the Cubans airlifted 18,000 troops into Angola, it was a powerful and selfless act of internationalist solidarity. Can we say the same for when we allow a private wedding-party from India to be airlifted into Waterkloof air-base? Siphoning hundreds of millions of rands out of South Africa to Dubai is not a blow against “white” monopoly capital.

Let us defend our national sovereignty. Let us be inspired by the outstanding example of comrade Fidel and the Cuban revolution. Let us assert fearlessly our right to our own path of sovereign national development against imperialist agendas, against monopoly capital, against corporate capture and corruption by parasitic forces. We owe this to our people. We owe this to the sacrifice that the Cuban people have made to our own country and region.

LONG LIVE THE MEMORY OF FIDEL CASTRO – PATRIOT, INTERNATIONALIST, HUMANIST!

Fidel Castro Ruz

When Fulgencio Batista staged a coup 10 March 1952, Fidel was one of the first to denounce the reactionary, illegitimate nature of the regime and call for its overthrow!

Author: [Granma](http://granma.cu) | internet@granma.cu | 1 December 2016 10:12:59 (Accessed on 1 December 2016 from Granma International, Official Voice of the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee <http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2016-12-01/fidel-castro-ruz> and edited by Umsebenzi Online, South African Communist Party's weekly online publication.)

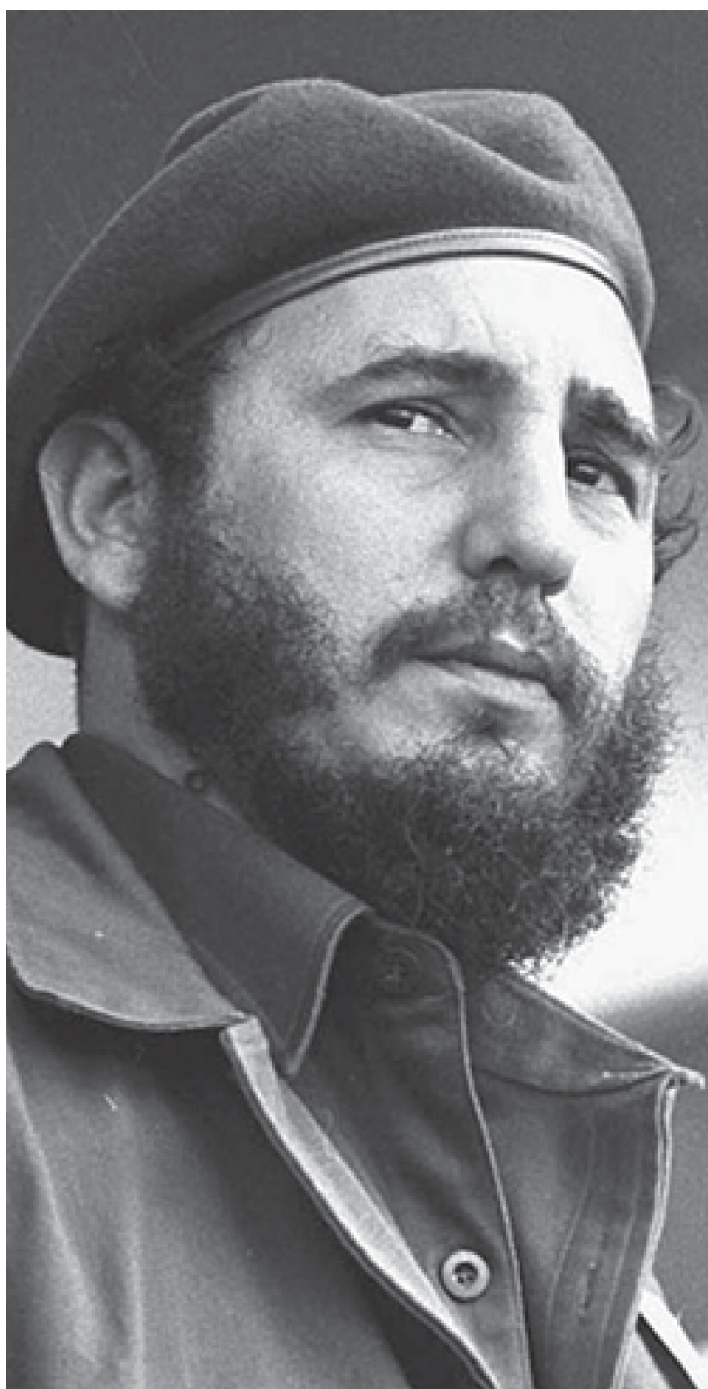


Photo: Liborio Noval

Fidel Castro Ruz was born 13 August 1926 in Birán, in the former province of Oriente and passed away on 25 November 2016. His father, Angel Castro Argíz, the son of poor farmers in Galicia, was a landholder and sugarcane colonist. His mother, Lina Ruz González, was from a rural family in the province of Pinar del Río.

He learned to read and write in a rural, public school in Birán, and continued his elementary education in the private Catholic boarding schools of La Salle and Dolores, in the city of Santiago de Cuba. He began his secondary studies at the same Dolores College and concluded them at the Jesuit Belén school, in Havana, from which he graduated in June of 1945.

The Jesuits of Belén said, "Fidel Castro always distinguished himself in all subjects related to Letters... He was a real athlete, and was able to win the admiration and affection of all. He would go on to study law, and we never doubted that he would write brilliant chapters in the book of his life. Fidel had the raw material and the sculptor will not be lacking."

In September 1945 he enrolled at the University of Havana, to study Law, Social Sciences and Diplomatic Law. There, he immediately joined the political struggles of the student body and assumed different positions in the University Student Federation. He was an outstanding member of different progressive and anti-imperialist organisations, such as the Pro Puerto Rican Independence Committee; the September 30 Committee, of which he was a founder; and the Pro Democracy in the Dominican Republic Committee, of which he was president.

As part of his political activity during these years, he organised and participated in innumerable protests and denounced the political and social situation in the country. He was beaten and jailed more than once by the repressive forces.

Between July and September 1947, the third year of his studies, he signed up to participate in an expedition to fight against the regime of Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. The volunteers trained on Confites Cay. He was promoted to lieutenant, squad leader, and then to head a battalion company. The expeditionaries set off to the sister republic by sea, but were intercepted by the Cuban Navy. Fidel jumped into the water with his rifle, to avoid capture, and always considered it shameful that the fighters ended up arrested without ever joining the struggle.

He came into contact with Marxist ideas as a university student. He sympathised with the Orthodox Party of the Cuban People, a progressive tendency, and participated actively in their electoral campaigns, beginning in 1948, in particular in that of the party's principal leader Eduardo R. Chibás. Within the political organisation, he worked to promote the most radical and combative positions among the youngest members. After the death of Chibas, he redoubled his efforts to unmask corruption within the government of Carlos Prío.

After his participation in the expedition against Trujillo, in 1948, he travelled to Venezuela, Panama, and Colombia, as a student leader, with the goal of organising a Latin American Student Congress, which was to take place in this last country.

He was in Bogotá when the rebellion erupted following the assassination of Colombian leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, in April this year. He threw himself into the struggle, and only survived by pure luck.

In March 1949, he led a protest in front of the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana, to express popular indignation with the disrespect shown by U.S. Marines to Cuban national hero José Martí, at a statue located in the centre of Old Havana.

In 1950, Fidel graduated with a PhD in Civil Law, and a bachelor's degree in Diplomatic Law. From his attorney's office, he devoted himself to defending the poor.

When Fulgencio Batista staged a coup 10 March 1952, Fidel was one of the first to denounce the reactionary, illegitimate nature of the regime and call for its overthrow.

He organised and trained a large contingent of almost a thousand young workers and students, fundamentally from the ranks of the Orthodox Party.

With 160 of these comrades, on 26 July 1953, he led the assault on the Moncada Garrison in Santiago de Cuba and one in Bayamo, in an action conceived to detonate the armed struggle against the Batista dictatorship.

The plan for a surprise attack failed, and they were unable to accomplish their objective. Fidel was imprisoned by the tyranny's repressive forces, a few days after the military setback, and was held incommunicado for 76 days. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to 15 years in prison, after defending himself in a private hearing, under guard, giving a statement known as "History will absolve me," in which he outlined the future Cuban Revolution's program.

"No weapon, no force is capable of defeating a people that decides to struggle for its rights. There are innumerable historical examples in the past, and in the present. Just recently, in the case of Bolivia, where miners with their sticks of dynamite, defeated and crushed the regular army's regiments," he said on that occasion.

In prison, he continued his work denouncing the oppressive regime, while at the same time perfected his revolutionary plans, and deepened his theoretical and ideological foundation and that of his compañeros.

As a result of popular pressure and a broad campaign, he was released in May 1955. Over subsequent weeks he carried out an intense effort agitating and denouncing the regime, and founded the July 26 Movement to continue the revolutionary struggle.

In July 1955, seeing the impossibility of moving forward against Batista via legal means, Fidel departs for Mexico, to organise an armed insurrection in exile. In precarious economic conditions, and subjected to the vigilance and persecution of the dictatorship's agents, the organisational and preparatory work continued, while at the same time, the ideas and goals of the insurrection were disseminated. Fidel travelled to the United States - to Philadelphia, New York, Tampa, Union City, Bridgeport and Miami - where, along with exiled compatriots, he established "patriotic clubs" to build economic and political support for the revolutionary struggle.

Under the banner of Fidel's words: "In 1956, we will be free, or we will be martyrs," he, Raúl, Juan Manuel Márquez, Ernesto Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos, Juan Almeida, and other outstanding revolutionaries trained with long walks through the streets of Mexico City, scaling mountains, self defence, guerrilla tactics, and target shooting.

On 20 June 1956, the leader of the July 26 Movement, Che, and others were arrested, the safe houses discovered, and a significant portion of the weapons they had collected confiscated.

After they were released by the Mexican police, plans were accelerated. The Granma yacht was purchased and they set sail for Cuba, during the dawn hours of 25 November 1956, from Tuxpan, with 82 combatants aboard, whose average age was 27.

After seven days at sea, they landed on 2 December, at Las Coloradas, on the south-western coast of the former province of Oriente. Batista's forces located the landing site and attacked the expeditionaries. On 5 December, Fidel and his comrades were surprised at Alegría de Pío. The revolutionaries were split up, several captured, and many killed in the attack.

With the valiant collaboration of local campesinos, Fidel and Raúl are reunited in Cinco Palmas, and regrouped the revolutionary forces, departing for the Sierra Maestra mountains to continue the struggle.

On 17 January 1957, Fidel led the insurgents' first armed attack on the Batista army, at the Plata Garrison, and won their first victory. The Rebel Army began to grow and become stronger.

In his role as Commander in Chief, Fidel directed the armed struggle of the rebel forces and the work of the July 26 Movement for 25 months, during the war. Under his direct command was the José Martí Column One, and he participated personally in almost all of its operations and the most important battles that took place in the First Rebel Front's territory.

Following a crushing defeat, the principal leaders of the dictatorship's elite troops decided to recognise the rebel victory in the theatre of operation in the province of Oriente, on 28 December 1958. During the dawn hours of 1 January 1959, Fidel neutralised a coup attempt in Havana - supported by the U.S. – by calling a general strike, and entered the city of Santiago de Cuba that very day, arriving in Havana with the Freedom Caravan on 8 January.

He maintained his role as Comandante en Jefe after the insurrection ended, and on 13 February 1959, was named Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government.

He directed and participated in all actions undertaken to defend the country and the Revolution, against both military aggression from abroad and attacks by counter-revolutionary bands within the nation.

In particular, he led the Cuban forces that defeated the invasion organised by the CIA at Playa Girón, on the Bay of Pigs, in April 1961.

He led the Cuban people through the dramatic days of the October Crisis in 1962.

In the name of the revolutionary government, he proclaimed the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution on 16 April 1961.

He took the lead as secretary general of the Integrated Revolutionary Organisations of this era, and later in the same position heading the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba. When the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba was established, he was elected First Secretary, a decision which has been ratified by delegates to five Party Congresses.

He was elected as a deputy to the National Assembly of People's Power, representing a district in Santiago de Cuba, from its creation in 1976, and was chosen by this body as the President of Cuba's Councils of State and Ministers until 2006.

He led official Cuban delegations to more than 50 countries, and received multiple decorations abroad and in Cuba, as well as academic honours from institutions of higher learning in Cuba, Latin America, and Europe.

He strategically directed hundreds of thousands of Cuban combatants on international missions in Algeria, Syria, Angola, Ethiopia, and other countries; while inspiring and organising tens of thousands of Cuban doctors, teachers, and technicians who have offered their services in more than 40 countries of the Third World, along with the provision of training to tens of thousands of students from these nations. Fidel led the establishment of assistance and cooperation to establish comprehensive healthcare programs in numerous countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and the creation in Cuba of international schools offering studies in medicine, sports, and other sciences and disciplines.

On a global level, he promoted the Third World's battle against the reigning economic order, in particular against crippling foreign debt, the wasting of resources on military spending, and neoliberal globalisation, as well as efforts to build unity and integration among Latin American and Caribbean nations.

He has headed the decisive action of the Cuba people to confront the impact of the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States, since its inception, and likewise in confronting the consequences of the collapse of the socialist camp, leading the tenacious efforts of Cubans to overcome the great difficulties that resulted, overseeing the resistance and reinitiating a period of growth and economic development.

Throughout the Revolution's many years, he inspired and directed the Cuban people's struggle for the consolidation of our revolutionary process; its advance toward socialism; the unity of revolutionary forces and the entire people; the country's social and economic transformation; the development of education, health, sports, culture, science, and defence; the country's response to foreign aggression; the country's active, principled foreign policy based on solidarity with world's peoples struggling for their independence; and the deepening of the people's revolutionary, internationalist, communist consciousness.

In 2006, for health reasons he was obligated to resign from his position as President of the Councils of State and Ministers, and in the 2011 at the 6th Party Congress he stepped down as First Party Secretary, retaining his seat as a deputy (or representative/Member of the National Assembly) in the National Assembly of People's Power until his death.

Throughout these last ten years, he has carried out productive work, writing Reflections and hundreds of articles, while with great perseverance conducting experiments related to improving human and animal nutrition.

On the basis of his immense moral authority, until his last breath, he continued to contribute his opinions regarding the most important battles undertaken by the Revolution.

The life of Fidel cannot be reduced to a few lines. His permanent, insoluble ties with the people, his brilliant oratory, his constant teaching, and his unlimited dedication to the Revolution have left an indelible mark in the Cuban people and served to inspire millions of men and women on all continents. Future generations of Cuban will have in him, as in Martí, an enduring example and the inspiration to give continuity to his work.

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110 Cnr Jorissen and Simmond Street
Moses Kotane Floor, COSATU House, Braamfontein 2001
Tel: 011 339 3621/2 Fax 011 339 4244
e-mail: info@sacp.org.za