
FIDEL CASTRO ON WHY CUBAN VOLUNTEERS ARE IN ANGOLA



WHY CUBAN VOLUNTEERS ARE FIGHTING IN ANGOLA

"Those who once enslaved man and sent him to America perhaps never imagined that one of those peoples (the Cubans) who received the slaves would one day send their fighters to struggle for freedom in Africa.

On November 5, 1975, at the request of the MPLA, the leadership of our party decided to send with great urgency a battalion of regular troops with antitank weapons to help the Angolan patriots resist the invasion of the South African racists. This was the first Cuban troop unit sent to Angola. When it arrived in the country, the foreign interventionists in the north were 25 kilometres from Luanda, their 140-millimeter artillery was bombing the suburbs of the capital, and the South African fascists had already penetrated more than 700 kilometers into the south from the Namibian border, while Cabinda was heroically defended by MPLA fighters and a handful of Cuban instructors.

The enemy has talked about the number of Cubans in Angola. It is sufficient to say that once the struggle began, Cuba sent the men and weapons necessary to win that struggle. To give due honour to our people, we must say that hundreds of thousands of fighters from our regular troops and reserves were ready to fight alongside their Angolan brothers.

Cuba alone bears the responsibility for taking that decision. The USSR had always helped the peoples of the Portuguese colonies in their struggle for independence, provided besieged Angola with basic aid in military equipment, and collaborated with us when imperialism had cut off practically all our air routes to Africa, but it

never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country.

No country of Black Africa has anything to fear from Cuban military personnel. We are a Latin-African people - enemies of colonialism, neocolonialism, racism and apartheid, which Yankee imperialism aids and protects.

The Yankee imperialists have hundreds of soldiers abroad; they have military bases on all continents and all seas. In Korea, Japan, the Phillipines, Turkey, Western Europe, Panama, and many other places, their military installations can be counted by the dozens and hundreds. In Cuba itself they occupy by force a piece of our territory.

What moral and legal right do they have to protest that Cuba provides instructors and assistance for the technical preparation of the armies of African countries and of other parts of the underdeveloped world that request them?

What right do they have to criticize the aid and solidarity we give to a sister people of Africa such as Angola, who have been criminally attacked?

The imperialists are pained that Cuba, the attacked and blockaded country they tried to destroy fifteen years ago by a mercenary invasion, is today a solid and indestructible bulwark of the world revolutionary movement, whose examples of bravery, dignity, and determination gives encouragement to peoples in their struggle for liberation.

On the other hand, our revolutionary action is in keeping with the world balance of forces and in the interest of world peace. We are not enemies of detente or of peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems based on strict respect for the norms of international law. (An African Giron: April 1976)

ON THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL OF CUBAN FORCES

The positions occupied by the forces in the south can't be vacated in a few weeks, because the Angolan army must take over, and it needs time and cadres, new units and means, because it must fight the UNITA mercenary bands. They need some time, as we see it, not less than three years to be able to take on this task; that is reasonable, perfectly reasonable. If they did otherwise, they would face some very serious problems. They need more time to replace the other troops, since it is a huge country with a series of strategic

spots; airports, bridges, industries, and hydroelectric plants. We are currently defending many of those points.

They have a strong army, which is gaining in experience, cadres and fighting spirit. They have increased their forces and, in time, in the future they will be able to defend their country against foreign attack while also opposing subversion and fighting UNITA.

UNITA exists because of foreign aid. UNITA struck a deal with South Africa. For Black Africa this is treason, a deal with the South African racists is treason. We are the ones who benefit most from a settlement. I tell you frankly, we benefit most; we have been there for nine years, more than 200,000 Cubans have been to Angola. This is a real effort and we have no economic interest in Angola at all. But if a solution acceptable to Angola does not materialize, we will firmly continue with our support to that country as long as necessary. (Interview - January 1985)

ON THE BASIS OF CUBAN INTERNATIONALIST CO-OPERATION

It has often been claimed, that the Angolans pay for the Cuban troops stationed there. I want to say that no life of any Cuban has its price. It cannot be paid for with \$1trillion or \$100 billion. Our military cooperation has never been paid for in any country of the world where we have given it, never! Neither in Angola nor anywhere else. Some countries with the means have paid for civilian cooperation: doctors, engineers. In the great majority of countries, that cooperation is also free.

We pay salary here in Cuba for all those rendering internationalist cooperation; civilians, military, officers, all have their salary paid here. Many are from the reserves, workers from the reserves who are in military units.

We have thousands of people working in those conditions now, without involving hard-currency expenditure. Nor does their return mean unemployment, because we are paying them here. Nor does it mean a cut in spending because they would do other work in Cuba. It doesn't create unemployment or any other problems.

We can do this for a basic reason which is not economic: we have the people to do it. That is the secret, and that is what the revolution has created....when we had 2000 teachers in Nicaragua, it is because we could do it; but we could send 30,000 or 100, 000 because they

have been educated with that idea. These are motivations and moral values the revolution has sown in them all.

Sometimes the country we are helping is very poor and we also pay part of the expenses of our personnel. But the general rule is: housing and food are provided by the country and we pay the salaries. We send eight doctors to one apartment; it proves easier for the host nation to have eight doctors in small lodgings. If they seek a doctor in Europe, they must provide a home for the family, pay his vacations, and spend about \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year. Meanwhile, eight of our doctors live in one apartment, they are provided for, and are not paid for their work. Those are the bases of our cooperation in all countries.

A few countries with the means to do so pay for civilian cooperation, a few countries, for the doctors, teachers, engineers, construction workers...About 90 percent of the countries are very poor and we don't charge for our help.

We also have about 22, 000 scholarship students in Cuba from more than eighty countries; many doctors, engineers, and technicians from these countries have been trained in Cuba. We are sincerely concerned about the situation in Third World nations. It is not simply diplomatic and political activity, it is a reality which we feel and have experienced and which we raise at all international forums. (We will stay as long as necessary: January 1985.)