

**Gabriel C. Salvia**

# Memory, human rights and international democratic solidarity





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*Memory, human rights and international democratic solidarity*

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# Presentation

This work is divided into two parts, featuring at first seven articles, and, second, two reports and a book chapter, published between the years 2017 and 2024, which can be read in any order. The common thread is the one synthesized in the title of the book.

This book was an old idea to compile texts summarizing CADAL's work in promoting human rights and international democratic solidarity. The motivation to publish it now arose with the news of having been awarded the *Gratias Agit 2024* granted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

For this reason, this book is in honor of one of the Czech personalities that inspire my work as an international human rights activist: Václav Havel; and also of the Czech foreign policy on human rights and its vigorous civil society that is an example to be followed by the organization I founded in 2003 in Argentina and in 2020 in the United States, CADAL.

I visited the Czech Republic for the first time in September 2004 to attend the Prague Summit for Democracy in Cuba, convened by Václav Havel. Subsequently, I revisited the Czech Republic to attend the impressive Forum2000 meetings, which inspired the establishment of CADAL's Buenos Aires Conference on the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarianism, every August 23rd. An article in this book refers to this annual event, a sort of "mini-Forum2000".

Previously, before the emergence of CADAL, following the detention in 2001 of two Czech citizens in Cuba, Jan Bubenik and Ivan Filip, I met with the then Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Argentina, Edita Hrdá, to express my solidarity. For more than 20 years I have maintained a friendly relationship with Edita and her family, with whom I met when she fulfilled diplomatic functions in New York, Prague and Brussels. Edita was kind enough to fulfill one of my dreams during a visit to the Czech Republic: to take me to Václav Havel's country house in Hradec̣ek.

While passing through Prague, I can't miss visiting the place that remembers Jan Palach on Wenceslas Square, leaving a red rose and lighting a candle. The story of Palach never ceases to move me.

A text that I include in this book is about the alliance that the Argentine military dictatorship (1976-1983) maintained with the Cuban revolution. The Memory of this issue is one of the reasons for my work in the defense and promotion of human rights in Cuba, just as the Czechs do not forget Fidel Castro's support in 1968 for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. That invasion led Palach to immolate himself as a form of protest.

During my visits to Prague I also visited several times the Memorial to the victims of communism, where the phrase installed there, especially the final part that says "And to all those whose lives were ruined by communism", stuck with me.

I am also moved by the sight of so many Tibetan flags in Prague. In Buenos Aires, it is unthinkable to see something like that, except every 10th of March in the window of my apartment in Constitución neighborhood.

Thanks to a young volunteer of Forum2000, Tomas Novak, in another of my visits to the Czech Republic I had the opportunity to visit Terezin and Lidice, which also left me moved. Later I visited the church of St. Cyril and St. Methodius in the center of Prague, which commemorates the brave paratroopers who attacked Reinhard Heydrich, one of the Nazi commanders who promoted the Holocaust (Shoá).



One night at home in Buenos Aires, searching Netflix for an interesting movie to watch, I discovered the story of Milada Horáková, thanks to the film directed by David Mrnka. Since then, CADAL first published a report on Milada, written by an international intern, Greg Ross, and then - with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation - a book commissioned to the Argentine historian, Ricardo López Göttig, who holds a PhD in history from Karlova University in Prague.

In Prague I visited several places that remember Milada Horáková and the place where her house was. I also personally met David Mrnka, who generously gave me a copy of the film “Milada” to organize private and free presentations in order to spread the story of this Czech heroine, especially among exiles from Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

After Václav Havel’s death on December 18, 2011, his widow, Dagmar Havlová, authorized CADAL to create the Václav Havel Institute, dedicated to keeping alive the legacy of the first president of the Czech Republic in the promotion of human rights, international democratic solidarity and the memory of the totalitarianisms of the 20th century.

In all these years I have met very dear Czech personalities, whose list would be extensive, among diplomats and activist colleagues. For example, the former ambassador in Argentina, Stepan Zajac, who supported several solidarity meetings with colleagues from Cuba and arranged a talk at CADAL’s headquarters in Buenos Aires by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg.

Among Czech diplomats I also remember with great appreciation former Ambassador Petr Kopriva, who participated in the launching of CADAL’s Václav Institute at the Recoleta Cultural Center in Buenos Aires; Vladimir Eisenbruk, whom I met when he was Czech Ambassador in Costa Rica and who later participated in Lima, as Ambassador in Peru, in the presentation of the book “Diplomacy and Human Rights in Cuba”; Ambassador Zdenek Kubanek, who supported a CADAL event on China in Mexico City; Martin Palous, with whom we coincided in several activities; Czech diplomats

awarded for their committed work in Cuba, such as Filip Vurm, Frantisek Fleisman and Stanislav Kazecky. And the former consuls in Buenos Aires Milan Frola and Ondrej Pometlo.

Undoubtedly, the greatest institutional link in the relations between CADAL and the Czech Embassy in Buenos Aires took place in recent years with Ambassador Lubomir Hladik and Deputy Chief of Mission Filip Kanda, two diplomats who were sensitive, committed and too generous to me.

I was also very happy at the time to learn that a colleague from the Czech civil society, with whom we participated in an initiative on transitions, Jiri Kozak, was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Czech Republic and who was always very receptive in our communications.

This book is a gesture of gratitude to all these people and many more in the Czech Republic, and especially to the honor they have bestowed on me for my humble contribution in highlighting the Memory and example that their country represents and inspires for the international defense of human rights.

*Gabriel C. Salvia*

GENERAL DIRECTOR OF CADAL

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BUENOS AIRES, AUGUST 31, 2024

# First part

An act of remembrance and solidarity



Two kinds of diplomacy in Cuba:  
the complacent and the committed



Milada Horáková and the remembrance  
for the victims of totalitarianism



Democracy and global peace



Remembrance and international  
democratic solidarity



The international claim for Tibet



The challenge of confronting dictatorships



08-23-2017

## An act of remembrance and solidarity

Last year, the City of Buenos Aires passed the law 5608, establishing August 23rd as the city's official Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarianism. The adoption of this legislation was headed by the Center for the Opening and Development of Latin America (CADAL, for its acronym in Spanish) in coordination with city legislators Cecilia de la Torre and Francisco Quintana.

August 23rd marks the anniversary of the signing of the 1939 non-aggression pact between National-Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The former President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, a Polish national, referred to the pact as "collusion between the two worst forms of totalitarianism in human history." It was at the initiative of Václav Havel, along with other politicians and human rights activists, that the European Parliament, followed by Canada, first decided to officially commemorate the victims of totalitarianism on this day.

By commemorating these innocent lives, Buenos Aires not only pays tribute to the victims of past abuses but it also takes on a renewed commitment to standing in solidarity with the victims of current acts of racial intolerance and those facing persecution by the world's remaining dictatorships. These dictatorships, which still govern over a quarter of the global population, include the governments of North Korea, China, Cuba, Turkmenistan,

Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Congo, Bahrain, Ethiopia, and Saudi Arabia.

Despite passing with 37 votes, this law commemorating the victims of totalitarianism faced resistance from 15 legislators. Its opposition was comprised of Kirchnerista sympathizers of the “vamos por todo” slogan; representatives from the nostalgic revolutionary-left parties; Martín Lousteau’ political ally, Roy Cortina; and friend to Pope Francis’ father, Gustavo Vera.

It is worth noting that Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights –passed on December 10, 1948, with abstention from the socialist block– reads, “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

It is very concerning for the strengthening and consolidation of Argentina’s democracy that some political sectors decided to vote against commemorating the more than 100,000 people that fell victim to Communism in, mainly, the former Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Cuba, including those victims persecuted for the very same motives that the Universal Declaration recognizes as being rights and liberties.

Today, a victim of totalitarianism is not only a person who was jailed or executed but also “those whose lives were ruined by totalitarian despotism,” as it is stated on the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Prague. As the Italian Academic Loris Zanatta summarizes it, “There is no place for an individual’s autonomy or passiveness in a totalitarian state: there will always be a neighborhood committee, a party cell, a prying neighbor, or a government spy seeking to monitor one’s lifestyle and adherence to the regime’s moral norms.”

In line with the progressive, liberal philosophy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Cecilia de la Torre defended the proposal

with courage at the city legislature. In her presentation, she stated, “given the need to never forget the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes nor their victims, and given that the temptation of totalitarianism is still present in parts of the world today, I think it is necessary that this date be recognized in the City of Buenos Aires.”

From this year forward, the Argentine capital will be a pioneer city in Latin America as it commemorates the victims of totalitarianism every 23rd of August. Someone who will always be in our thoughts on this day will be Cecilia de la Torre, who passed last December; her civic engagement with human rights and the past has been nothing short of exemplary during her short political career.





07-19-2019

## Two kinds of diplomacy in Cuba: the complacent and the committed

Currently, five Ladies in White (“Damas de Blanco”) remain in prison in Cuba, convicted or awaiting trial for “crimes” ranging from disregard, disorder, defamation and resistance or non-payment of arbitrary fines. These are Yolanda Santana, Marta Sánchez, Xiomara de las Mercedes Cruz Miranda, Aimara Nieto Muñoz and Nieves Matamoros. For these and other cases, Berta Soler, one of the Ladies in White, leaves her home in the neighborhood of Lawton in Havana every Sunday to deploy a precarious banner with a text that claims for the freedom of political prisoners, and immediately about ten women of the revolutionary national police of Cuba lunge at her, drag her into a patrol car like an animal and keep her in detention for a few hours without any charges, and later release her wherever.

Only in this action with Berta Soler, the Cuban military dictatorship violates six articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Every individual has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.” (Article 3), “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” (Article 5), “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest” (Article 9), “Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.” (Article 13), “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference” (Article 19), and “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.” (Article 20).

This is just one example of human rights violations in Cuba, and one might ask: What is the role of the international democratic community facing such arbitrariness, especially the role of the foreign diplomatic corps in Cuba.

In his book “National interest, persecuted Argentinean politicians without refuge: diplomacy, human rights and disappeared”; Enrico Calamai, former Italian Consul in Buenos Aires during Argentina’s last military dictatorship, states: “I was able to check the real possibilities of humanitarian intervention that offer the privileges and immunities recognized by international law. I imagine a diplomacy that uses them according to the values of civil society.” And he adds, “The intelligence of diplomacy must find a way to stand between the brutality of power and its victims; the first, only concerned about the elimination of any possible opponent, the second, in search of any open door for its physical survival.”

However, as the case of Cuba shows, what abounds in diplomacy that serves in countries ruled by dictatorships, as was Argentina at the time, is indifference. For Calamai, “The temptation to pretend nothing happened, gives vertigo... There’s a way not to be guilty too: to do something. Extend my privileges to those who roam the city for help.” And he concludes: “there is an instinctive force that pushes the normal man to help those in danger... To me, the others are abnormal, those who don’t see or pretend they don’t see, or worse, those who don’t do nothing despite seeing.”

The list of “abnormal diplomats” in Cuba would be long. For example, those of democratic countries whose officials never received any nomination for the Award of Committed Diplomacy in Cuba, as if they were not even there. And most worryingly, after conferring the last edition of the Award of Committed Diplomacy in Cuba 2016-2018, some embassies showed setbacks in their diplomacy and went from active solidarity to docility with the Cuban dictatorship. In some cases, these are very important democratic countries.

How much of a difference would they make if every Sunday instead of going to a beach –or enjoying a meal which is impossible for the majority of the Cuban people – several diplomats from democratic countries came together and went to Berta Soler’s home to witness what happens to her when she leaves home to exercise her human rights. Making this gesture of solidarity, as did years ago a German diplomat and a British diplomat, would more than likely bring an end to this fascist practice of the Cuban government.

Complacency causes satisfaction, fulfillment or pleasure to someone. In this regard, it is inconceivable that a number of legations in Havana that sign international cooperation agreements with Cuba’s single party regime will not condition the provision of funds –not necessarily to human rights advances involving political openness– but not even to the release of the innocently and arbitrarily detained, the end of the harassment of peaceful opponents or of preventing them from leaving the country under an illegal pretext of them being “regulated”. This attitude of complacency is unacceptable for democratic countries. What will many diplomats tell their children and grandchildren when being asked about what they did when they served in Cuba? Only a very few will be able to answer that question with pride and die with a clear conscience.

### **TO PUT ONESELF IN SOMEBODY ELSE’S SHOES**

Committed diplomacy practices consist of the assistance provided by foreign service officers to victims of persecution and political harassment in another country where they serve, and they are more committed when they are performed without receiving instructions to do so.

From 2003-2008, CADAL established the Award of Committed Diplomacy in Cuba which has just completed six editions and has so far recorded thirteen supportive diplomats who served on the island providing recognition, support and protection for those who peacefully defend human rights and promote political pluralism on the island. Three of those diplomates came from the Czech Republic, three from the United States,

two from Germany, two from Sweden and one each from the Netherlands, Poland and the United Kingdom.

This award, in addition to recognizing the diplomats' solidarity while serving in Cuba, represents a democratic exercise for the Cuban opposition because it's the opponents and independent journalists who nominate diplomats and support their nomination.

In 2003, CADAL chose to create this award for two reasons. Firstly, 2003 was the year of CADAL's legal constitution and, secondly, coincided with the repressive wave in Cuba known as "The Black Spring", which included arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of peaceful opponents accused of crimes that in democratic countries are fundamental rights.

In 2017, CADAL presented a "Special Mention to Committed Diplomacy in Cuba" to the Chilean writer and diplomat Jorge Edwards, author of the bestselling book "Persona Non Grata" and pioneer of solidary diplomacy in Cuba.

The recognition of members of the civic movement in Cuba, by foreign diplomats, consists in not limiting the official relations of a democratic country to contacts with officials of the Cuban single-party regime. In a democratic country, foreign diplomats—in addition to official contacts with local authorities—also interact and establish exchanges with a representative sample of the society in which they are located. Committed diplomacy in Cuba therefore implies not to extend to the referents of the Cuban independent civic movement the "illegal" character that the dictatorship imposes on them.

The support and protection offered by foreign diplomats to the citizens who are victims of persecution, repression or political harassment, is what characterizes a humanitarian foreign policy based on international commitment to human rights and which is defined as "the new diplomacy".

CADAL created the Award of Committed Diplomacy in Cuba by taking as a precedent the solidarity actions of several foreign diplomats during

the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, including those of Enrico Calamai, who stood out not only in Argentina but also in Chile during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

The journalist and international political analyst Jorge Elías summarizes in the foreword to the book “Diplomacy and Human Rights in Cuba”, that the practices of committed diplomacy are “the ability of the human being to put themselves in the shoes of others in the eagerness to help them, although they speak another language, profess another religion, or are of a different color. This capacity goes beyond the position they hold: it responds to the will and sensitivity of each of them, as well as to the firmness of their democratic convictions.

Those who may have enjoyed a pleasant stay in a paradisiacal place have acted according to their principles; most of them alone and without a network.” For this very reason, Elías concludes: “What is a better incentive than rewarding the silent work of a person reserved in its expression and discreet in its proceeding?”

### **THE CZECHS LEAD COMMITTED DIPLOMACY IN CUBA**

On May 25, 2019, CADAL announced that Filip Vurm, who worked at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Havana between 2014 and 2018, was the winner of the 2016-2018 Cuban Committed Diplomacy Award. Accepting the award, he said: “I am very honored to receive the Award for Committed Diplomacy in Cuba. This award reminds me of all the brave and honest Cubans who strive in very adverse conditions to make their beautiful homeland a democratic, just and prosperous country. It has been a privilege for me to meet these women and men during my stay in Cuba. I am proud that it is they, who appreciated my diplomatic activities in Havana”.

Filip Vurm was born on May 9, 1982 in Prague. He studied history at the faculty of humanities of the Charles University in Prague. From 2008 to 2011 he was professor of history at the Czech-Spanish institute Budějovická of Prague. He joined the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of the Czech Republic in October 2011. From 2012 to 2014 he worked in the Department of the Americas of the Czech Chancellery. From July 29, 2014 to August 17, 2018 he served as Third Secretary of the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Havana. He currently works as the deputy head of the Czech embassy in Afghanistan.

In this sixth edition, 14 foreign diplomats were nominated for their solidarity work, that completed their endeavor in Cuba between 2016 and 2018: six from the United States, one of them received seven votes; two from the European Union and Norway; and one from the Czech Republic, Sweden, United Kingdom, France and Spain. In total 39 democratic referents voted in Cuba, of which the Czech diplomat received 29 votes and was nominated by various groups and referents of the Cuban civic movement residing in different places of Cuba.

—“He has been one of the diplomats most directly involved in respecting human rights. He supported the groups that demand compliance and has provided assistance to the network of independent libraries personally attending at times that he was invited on the occasion of some activity. His performance has been exemplary and nourished with dignity. Thanks to Filip Vurm and the Czech Republic.”;

—“During his stay of a little more than three years, he developed a tremendous work agenda with the civil society, the democratic opposition and human rights activists, which included the selection of beneficiaries of funds from the Czech government and the approach to the provinces to verify human rights violations.”

—“very aware of the independent culture work on the island, always held out his hand in solidarity when we had no venue for cultural evenings”;

—“he has been one of the main animators of the non-official Independent Writers’ Club of Cuba, headed by the prominent Cuban writer and journalist Jorge Olivera Castillo, and of many meetings of these members of the independent civil society of the island.”;

—“I nominate him for his outstanding work in bringing Europe closer to the reality of Cuban civil society and its solidarity with personalities, activists and Cuban independent projects.”;

—“he has been very professional, because he has combined his desire to do good, aimed at asserting universally recognized values and rights, and respect for our own identity and beliefs. He has given continuity in exemplary form to the work that his predecessor did, who deserved this award at his time. An example of this is the visit he has made to the homes of different members of the autonomous Cuban civil society, when they have been repressed, as well as participating in events and other activities.”;

—“He visited us with his wife and little daughter several times and participated in activities. He invited us to his embassy and coordinated contacts with other embassies, enabling the EU’s commitment to the protection of human rights and democracy”;

—“During the time he worked as a diplomat in Cuba, he showed a remarkable solidarity and spirit of support for civil society and the groups struggling to restore the lost democracy to our suffering homeland.”;

In the editions of the Award for Committed Diplomacy in Cuba 2003-2008 and 2013-2014, the winners of Czech diplomats Stanislav Kazecky and Frantisek Fleisman, respectively.





08-24-2020

## Milada Horáková and the remembrance for the victims of totalitarianism

On August 25, 2016, the Legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires approved the bill that established August 23 as the “Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarianism” (Law 5608), which remembers the date of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the Foreign Ministers of Nazi Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The members of parliament Cecilia de la Torre and Francisco Quintana promoted the legislative initiative, following the precedent set by the European Parliament. The Buenos Aires city legislature voted on the bill and announced the following result: out of 58 votes cast, 37 were for and 15 against the bill, with 6 abstentions.

Those who argued against this initiative opposed putting National Socialism and Communism on the same level. In this regard, the story of the Czech lawyer, social democratic politician, journalist, and feminist activist Milada Horáková is just one of many examples of people who fell victim to both totalitarian regimes. Their fate thus argues in favour of adopting the “Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Totalitarianism” in the capital of the Argentine Republic.

Horáková was a pioneer of human rights activism and an emblematic figure in the defense of democracy in the then Czechoslovakia. The book *Milada Horáková: Defender of Human Rights and Victim of Totalitarianisms* by historian Ricardo López Göttig, recently published and available free of charge on the Internet, is an invitation to remember this brave woman

and to embrace the noble ideals she defended, for which she first suffered imprisonment in the Nazi concentration camp in Terezin and eventually was executed by the communists, despite pleas for clemency from prominent figures such as Albert Einstein and Eleanor Roosevelt. She was the only woman among the 200 executed by the Czechoslovak communist regime and her case is remembered as part of school education in the current Czech Republic. Her story was also made into a film called “Milada” by director David Mrnka, which can be watched on Netflix.

Milada represents everything that is right about defending human rights because she defended them against the various political forms of oppression. And because she embraced universal ideals, her example transcends her country, which is why her story deserves to be remembered in Latin America, where many victims of human rights violations during military dictatorships have defended –and continue to defend– political regimes such as those that ended the life of Milada Horáková and that of millions of people around the world. Human Rights activists are those who condemn and confront all types of dictatorships, regardless of their political orientation. Because all these regimes will be anti-democratic, meaning repressive of civil and political liberties.

03-11-2022

## Democracy and global peace

Russia's military invasion and attack on Ukraine is in part the result of international complacency with the autocratic regime of Vladimir Putin. History shows that people can always expect the worst from dictators and in the case of Putin there have already been precedents. For this reason, rather than inviting Putin to legitimize himself in meetings such as the G20 Summit, we must commit to those in Russia who peacefully promote human rights and political openness. The same applies to other autocracies.

Human rights are universal and, therefore, democracy is a universal right, despite those from the right and left who seek to play them down and thus justify regimes of political slavery. That is to say, the civil and political liberties recognized mainly in articles 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 20 and 21 of the declaration adopted on December 10, 1948, are universal human rights, for those who live in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, China, Russia and any country or territory in the world.

And experience shows that democratic countries, which guarantee these rights, despite their differences between them, coexist peacefully and resolve their disputes through diplomatic channels.

It is about taking seriously what is established in the Universal Declaration on Democracy, adopted in 1997 by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which in its article 3 establishes that "As an ideal, democracy aims essentially to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, to achieve social justice, foster the economic and social development

of the community, strengthen the cohesion of society and enhance national tranquility, as well as to create a climate that is favorable for international peace. As a form of government, democracy is the best way of achieving these objectives; it is also the only political system that has the capacity for self-correction.”

The countries that guarantee what is established in this article, not by chance, are those that the Democracy Index, published by The Economist, qualifies as full democracies and at the same time those that attract the greatest flow of immigrants. In this index, Russia qualifies as an autocracy.

In turn, article 12 of this Declaration establishes that “the key element in the exercise of democracy is the holding of free and fair elections at regular intervals enabling the people’s will to be expressed. These elections must be held on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage so that all voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness and transparency that stimulate political competition. To that end, civil and political rights are essential, and more particularly among them, the rights to vote and to be elected, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, access to information and the right to organise political parties and carry out political activities. Party organisation, activities, finances, funding and ethics must be properly regulated in an impartial manner in order to ensure the integrity of the democratic processes.”

Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and other countries with autocratic governments do not comply with the provisions of article 12 of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, which is why it is not appropriate for those countries that do respect this declaration to grant equal treatment to authorities that lack democratic legitimacy.

This has motivated the adoption of democratic provisions, mainly in Latin America, although they have become irrelevant as many democratic countries in the region coexist with autocracies without questioning, for example in CELAC.

Now, if the path to world peace depends on the globalization of democracy, then countries with governments based on the standards of article 12 of the Universal Declaration on Democracy must adopt international democratic solidarity as a fundamental axis of its foreign policy on human rights and do so without double standards.

One of the most advanced provisions on the matter comes into play here: in article 27, the Universal Declaration on Democracy refers to an international dimension: “A democracy should support democratic principles in international relations. In that respect, democracies must refrain from undemocratic conduct, express solidarity with democratic governments and non-State actors like nongovernmental organisations which work for democracy and human rights and extend solidarity to those who are victims of human rights violations at the hands of undemocratic regimes.”

This is one of the reasons behind the support for Ukraine, a democratic country that has been the victim of an autocracy’s armed aggression.

But nevertheless, several democratic countries have avoided condemning the criminal Russian military invasion, prioritizing economic or geopolitical interests, and hiding behind the “national interest.” They act as if they had learned nothing from the tragedy of World War II.

The greatest “national interest” of a democratic country must be the defense of human dignity above economic benefits or geopolitical interests.

Political realism may include maintaining official diplomatic relations, including commercial exchanges and consular assistance in autocratic states, but recognition, support and protection to those who promote universal human rights in dictatorial contexts must never be neglected.

If world peace is truly desired, instead of flirting with dictatorships and deludingly hoping that countries like Putin’s Russia or Xi Jinping’s China - without freedom of the press, credible statistics and alternation in power - will contribute something to a better global future, it is only appropriate to adopt greater democratic commitment.



02-27-2023

## Remembrance and international democratic solidarity

“International democratic solidarity” constitutes the act of “walking in the shoes” of those living in dictatorships, illuminating their situation, and being the “voice of the silenced”. The primary contributors to this labor of solidarity are human rights organizations, which draw attention to authoritarian-led societies where human rights are criminalized.

Democracies also see their share of human rights violations, especially when there is no effective public policy to guarantee economic, social, and cultural rights, such as access to education, healthcare, housing, social provisions, and culture. Civil liberties may also be violated, although those responsible for excesses (such as police brutality) must answer to the judicial system.

Therefore, by defending human rights on an international scale, an organization can promote and increase the recognition of human rights in its home country: transparent elections with an equal playing field; freedom of the press, expression, assembly, petition, and peaceful protest; access to public information; and the right to freely leave and return to one’s country. Rights such as these are taken as a given in a democracy but are currently nonexistent in almost one-third of countries worldwide, including three Latin American countries: Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

## **INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY**

International democratic solidarity is characterized by “naming and shaming” dictatorships and demanding that democratic governments implement a foreign policy which prioritizes human rights. The latter implies adopting the “principle of non-indifference”, as attributed to former US President Jimmy Carter. At the beginning of his term, Carter gave an inaugural address at the University of Notre Dame: “Because we are free we can never be indifferent towards the fate of freedom elsewhere”.

On the websites of many democratic countries’ diplomatic offices can be found an expression of the country’s commitment to the promotion and defense of human rights as a primary objective in its foreign policy. However, this is just a declaration, and sometimes a purely demagogic one.

In practice, foreign policy on human rights is limited by “national interest”, which puts economic and geopolitical questions before the international defense of human dignity.

Internal respect for human rights is the first requirement for a human-rights-focused foreign policy. In other words, the country implementing such a policy must possess the requisite moral authority to comment on situations in other countries. The country must also submit to UN supervision; for example, it can extend open and permanent invitations to rapporteurs, special procedures, and the UN working groups responsible for receiving denunciations about arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances, censorship, etc.

The second requirement of a human-rights-focused foreign policy is its universal application, meaning there is no “double standard”. Almost no country in this world meets this requisite, which represents the greatest practical limitation to such a policy. Commercial exchanges, economic investments, and political favors are privileged over the defense of human dignity.



It is also very common for politicians to show democratic solidarity during election cycles, but once assuming positions in government, they begin catering to dictatorships.

As an alternative to the limitations a government faces in its foreign policy, the parliamentary diplomacy can act on human rights, given that it is an independent power, something that doesn't exist in a dictatorship. For example, national legislators can introduce bills which condemn violations of human rights under dictatorial governments; solicit pronouncements from their respective governments in intergovernmental organisms; denounce electoral processes under autocratic regimes which are not free, fair, and transparent; recognize the labor and initiatives of democratic activists living in danger; and host dissidents from said countries.

However, legislators often form parliamentary peace groups with dictator-led countries where political pluralism is not respected. They succumb to official government directives, assuming a legislative self-censorship. Furthermore, political parties do not value a track record of human rights work when supporting candidates, even though a candidate with such a track record could apply their experience to their parliamentary work and become human rights referents in the government.

### **INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY FROM CIVIL SOCIETY**

If political realism often implies selling out rather than denouncing international human rights violations and prioritizing non-humanitarian "national interests", civil society is charged with a fundamental role in following through on idealism. In contrast to rotating democratic governments, civil society organizations which manage to build a good reputation endure through time, representing the hope of moral support for those who live in different parts of the world in conditions of political slavery.

Double standards must not be applied when judging foreign authoritarian regimes, whether the regime implements left-wing or right-wing ideology. This is a fundamental principle of human rights activism. Given that

human rights are universal rights, human rights organizations should vigilantly protect human rights in all cases, including when violated by governments which share ideological affinity with the organization. Organizations should also remember that international democratic solidarity should prioritize countries that repress freedom of association, expression, assembly, protest, and the right to political association –in other words, dictatorships.

CADAL is a private, non-partisan organization based in the City of Buenos Aires, which promotes as its mission human rights and international democratic solidarity. CADAL was founded in remembrance of and inspired by the solidarity shown to human rights activists, persecuted politicians, families of the detained and disappeared, and independent journalists during the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983).

Last year, appealing to the remembrance of the 1978 Argentina World Cup held under the military dictatorship's rule, CADAL implemented the campaign "Qatar 2022: the ball should not get stained". The campaign collected more than ten thousand signatures on a petition for the Argentine blue and white uniform to include a black human rights logo during official World Cup matches –a sign of mourning before the host country's responsibility for violations of fundamental freedoms and the deaths of workers who constructed the stadiums.

Argentina won the 2022 World Cup on December 18th in Qatar. However, neither the players nor the Argentine Football Association contributed to a compensation fund for the families of the workers who died while constructing the stadiums. Furthermore, Argentine public opinion reflects a near-universal indifference towards denunciations of Qatar's human rights violations. Taken together, these events signify the importance of CADAL's work in promoting remembrance and international democratic solidarity. This is especially true in 2023, when Argentina will celebrate the 75th anniversary of adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 40th anniversary of the country's return to democracy.

03-11-2024

## The international claim for Tibet

The 9th International Conference of Tibet Support Groups, which took place from February 22 to 25 in Brussels, could not have had a better ending. After the closing of the conference in a downtown hotel in the Belgian capital, the one hundred and seventy attendees from forty-two different countries, including Argentina, went out into the street to take a group photo. At the same moment, a large column of demonstrators in support of Ukraine was marching down the street. It was a poignant moment, with Tibet support groups shouting “Free Ukraine!” and then protesters in support of Ukraine responding “Free Tibet!”

A woman from the Ukrainian march approached a participant of the Tibet conference and handed her a Ukrainian flag and she then received in return a typical white Tibetan scarf. It was a magical moment of international democratic solidarity, where those who demand freedom and sovereignty for two territories invaded by autocracies –Russia in Ukraine and China in Tibet– converged in the capital of the European Union.

Thus culminated three days of support for the Tibetan people, having addressed, among other topics: the current human rights situation in Tibet, by Dukthen Kyi of the Central Tibetan Administration; surveillance and security in Tibet by Tenzin Dalha, researcher at the Tibet Policy Institute; colonial boarding schools in Tibet by Dr. Gyal Lo, Tibetan activist and sociologist of education; and ecological changes and destructions in Tibet by Dr. Martin Mills, Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Studies.

Gyal Lo, Tibetan activist and education sociologist; and ecological changes and destructions in Tibet by Dr. Martin Mills, Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Studies. Also participating in the meeting were Dolkun Isa, President of the World Uyghur Congress, and Joey Siu, researcher of Hong Kong Watch.

The opening of the conference was attended by Czech Mikuláš Peksa, Chairman of the Tibet Interest Group in the European Parliament; German Hans Gert Pöttering, former President of the European Parliament; Sikyong Penpa Tsering of the Central Tibetan Administration; and Vincent Metten, Director of the International Campaign for Tibet in Belgium.

Christian Democrat Hans Gert Pöttering recalled that he did not accept an official invitation to China because he was not allowed to visit Tibet and also his critical role in the context of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

For her part, Dukthen Kyi of the Human Rights Section of the Department of Information and International Relations of the Central Tibetan Administration, highlighted the increasing claims on Tibet in the fourth and most recent Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, held last January 23. In 2009, four countries had done so, in 2013 there had been seven, in 2018 nine and in 2024 they reached twenty: Germany, Austria, Australia, Canada, Denmark, United States, Estonia, France, Ireland, Japan, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, New Zealand, Netherlands, Poland, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Sweden and Switzerland.

As can be seen, no Latin American country made a recommendation to China on Tibet in its recent human rights review in Geneva, which reflects how far the Latin American region is from inserting itself internationally in the claim for noble causes, including countries such as Argentina, Chile and Uruguay that lived through terrible military dictatorships.

## **ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIBETAN NATIONAL UPRISING**

Despite the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party regime, with a narrative that assures that Tibet has always belonged to China, this territory of 2.5 million square kilometers, located in the highest mountains of the planet and where ten of the largest rivers of this region originate, was invaded by China under the command of Mao Zedong between 1949 and 1950. As Marco Antonio Karam, Director of Casa Tibet Mexico, points out, “As an independent nation, Tibet had a sovereign government, a national flag and currency, a postal system, its own language, laws and customs”.

Karam adds that “Following China’s military invasion, the restrictions that Tibetan families and monasteries have experienced are increasing ... Tibetans have become outcasts in their own country, the Chinese government has attempted to stamp out Tibetan culture and society, fundamental human rights continue to be denied, and more than 1.2 million Tibetans have died since China’s illegal occupation.”

The 9th International Conference of Tibet Support Groups culminated two weeks before the 65th anniversary of the Tibetan national uprising on March 10, a day that commemorates the brutal repression of the Tibetan national uprising in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, by the Chinese army, which left hundreds of Tibetans dead and many others imprisoned, forcing the exile of the 14th Dalai Lama. The story was popularized in the movie “Seven Years in Tibet”, starring Brad Pitt.

In many democratic countries, March 10 is remembered through the campaign “A flag for Tibet”, as for example in the Czech Republic with one of the most active organizations: “Czechs Support Tibet”. In this regard, it is worth remembering that the Czech writer and dissident Václav Havel (1936-2011), after the fall of communism, invited the Dalai Lama in February 1990, a month after taking office as president of the then Czechoslovakia, in a clear gesture of international democratic solidarity.

When Argentina considers the importance of international insertion, this must include support for noble causes in defense of human rights, as in the case of Tibet. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, the national interest of States that respect human rights is the international defense of human dignity, above economic and commercial exchanges.

Argentina will take an important step in its international democratic insertion when its foreign policy includes the claim for the situation in Tibet and when every March 10, as in the Czech Republic, the flag of Tibet is flown at the buildings of the national public administration as a gesture of solidarity in defense of human rights.

08-12-2024

## The Challenge of confronting dictatorships

The blatant electoral fraud perpetrated by the government of Nicolás Maduro in light of the adverse results of the elections of July 28, plus the subsequent repression of social protest, which has already resulted in dozens of deaths, and the possibility that the Venezuelan dictatorship will get away with perpetuating itself in power against the will of the people, has once again sparked the debate on what can be done internationally to confront this type of authoritarian regimes.

### **BACKGROUND**

This is not a new topic. In the 17th century Hugo Grotius in “De Jure Belli ac Pacis” argued the existence of a “right accorded to human society to intervene in the case of a tyrant who subjected his citizens to treatment that no one is authorized to do”.

In “The Crime of War”, Juan Bautista Alberdi anticipated at the end of the 19th century what today is known as the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), pointing out that “when one or many individuals of a State are trampled upon in their international rights, that is, as members of the society of mankind, even if it is by the government of their country, they can, by invoking international law, ask the world to enforce it on their persons, even if it is against the government of their country”.

More recently, Pope John Paul II, in a Yugoslav Wars-context, stated that “The international community ought to show more clearly its political will not to accept aggression and territorial conquest by force, nor the aberration of ethnic cleansing. [...] States no longer have a right to indifference. It seems clear that their duty is to disarm this aggressor, if all other means have proved ineffective. The principles of the sovereignty of States and of non-interference in their internal affairs - which retain all their value - cannot constitute a screen behind which torture and murder may be carried out”.

### **COMPLEXITY**

The truth is that, except for the most serious humanitarian crises, putting an end to human rights violations in dictatorial regimes by means of an international intervention is in practice a complex issue. On top of that, there is the fact that there are many other governments in the world that have equal or worse human rights records than the Venezuelan government, such as Russia, China and North Korea.

In fact, in the 2024 edition of The Economist’s Democracy Index, out of a total of 167 countries analyzed, 59 are authoritarian regimes, that is, nearly 40% of the world’s population. The index does not include micro-states and classifies only 24 as “full democracies”, 50 as “flawed democracies” and 34 as hybrid regimes.

Therefore, a first problem in confronting dictatorships is that they outnumber democracies among the 193 member states of the United Nations and this explains why two long-lived autocracies - such as China and Cuba - have been the ones that have been members of the UN Human Rights Council for the longest, as some sort of “permanent members”, obtaining comfortable votes in the General Assembly.

Another problem in dealing with dictatorships is that they perpetuate themselves in power, while democracies alternate governments which sometimes implies changes that include foreign policy objectives. In the case of dictatorships, their criminalization of press freedom, the right to protest



and political pluralism allows them to control internal repression without fear of losing power. Therefore, many dictatorships deploy great amounts of resources to their international influence, since it is from abroad that they receive criticism, denunciations and pressures.

## **CRITICISM AND CHANGE**

Certainly, human rights are not only violated in dictatorships, but the importance of focusing on them stems from the fact that in flawed democracies and in some hybrid regimes there are still possibilities for criticism, including through independent journalism and the freedom of association where, among other civil society organizations, those dedicated to the defense of human rights can operate with access to international cooperation. And of course, the right to political participation, with more than one party and elections that allow for debate and competition, is still guaranteed, even if elections do not meet the ideal of transparency and integrity.

It should also be considered that a major difference between dictatorships and flawed democracies is that most of the latter are subject to the supervision of regional and international human rights regimes. This should be a requirement for membership in the UN Human Rights Council, which would imply an amendment to its founding resolution by the General Assembly.

A further problem in confronting dictatorships is that in democracies, the governments' priority is to attend to the demands of their citizens, being accountable to public opinion, dealing with criticism, protests and strikes, responding to the press and guaranteeing the free exercise of their work, debating with opponents and competing periodically in free elections. Consequently, the priority of democratic governments is domestic issues, as reflected in the polls, and international positions are often used to mark internal differences and thus gain political advantage.

But it is precisely countries with democratic governments and high domestic standards of civil and political liberties that have the moral

authority to implement an active foreign policy in defense of human rights. The latter implies intervening by denouncing the situation in non-democratic countries with State policies that criminalize the exercise of human rights and showing solidarity with their victims, applying what is now called the “principle of non-indifference”.

## **PRIORITIES**

However, even democratic countries in many cases prioritize economic or geopolitical interests over the defense of human rights, and in most cases the “double standard” prevails. Criticizing some dictatorships and not others is one of the main problems in confronting them, forgetting that since December 10, 1948, the “national interest” of a democratic country must be the defense of human dignity. The universal character of human rights implies that they apply to all people in the world, whether they are in Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, China and Tibet, Saudi Arabia, Equatorial Guinea, Vietnam, Iran, Belarus, etc.

Perhaps the great problem in confronting dictatorships is the failure to act preventively and thus avoid their reproduction, speaking out in time when measures that lead to the slow death of democracy become evident in a country. This has been the case in Venezuela since Hugo Chavez came to power and began to erode the rule of law, the independence of powers, the restriction of civil and political liberties -especially freedom of the press- with a discretionary and corrupt management of public funds, and the perpetuation in power ignoring the will of the people.

Similarly, it is not enough now to denounce what has happened in Venezuela without extending it to most of the countries that quickly recognized the fraudulent triumph of Nicolás Maduro, such as the dictatorships of China, Russia, Iran, Syria, Belarus, Qatar, Cuba and Nicaragua. In all these countries, the violation of popular sovereignty is institutionalized, either by their undemocratic institutional regime, such as the one-party system that outlaws political pluralism, or by totally rigged elections. To

give an example, the European Union has never questioned the democratic illegitimacy of the government of Cuba, which has been in power for more than 65 years and is Venezuela's main ally.

For this very reason, as Garry Kasparov, Russian dissident and world chess champion for more than twenty years, said, "When democracies make nice with dictators, the world's worst regimes get away with murder".

## **COORDINATION**

Consequently, it is time for democracies to adopt a coordinated and active foreign human rights policy, assigning it a higher priority - for example, by appointing a human rights ambassador in Latin American countries, as ten European countries are doing - and increasing the budget allocation in their respective foreign ministries. And, of course, such a policy has to be based on its general application and on maintaining high standards of domestic respect for civil and political liberties.

Confronting dictatorships and promoting international democratic solidarity with their victims, as some governments, intergovernmental bodies and foreign civil society organizations did during Argentina's last military dictatorship, is the only way to globalize human rights and thereby promote world peace. It is an objective that clearly deserves greater investment, including international cooperation in support of democratic actors in dictatorships and in exile.

But also making serious human rights situations visible, denouncing dictatorships, serves to value and strengthen fundamental freedoms in democratic countries themselves. It is a challenge for governments and also for citizens. Because, as Václav Havel said: "Without free, autonomous and self-respecting citizens, there can be no free and independent nations. Without internal peace, that is, without peace among citizens and between citizens and the State, there can be no guarantee of external peace: a State that ignores the will and rights of its citizens can offer no guarantee that it will respect the will and rights of other peoples, nations and States".



# Second part

Closed Memory: the complicity  
of the cuban revolution with the argentine  
military dictatorship



The limits of the human rights foreign  
policy and the importance of international  
democratic solidarity



Parliamentary diplomacy on human rights



03-20-2020

## Closed memory: the complicity of the cuban revolution with the argentine military dictatorship

### INTRODUCTION

It is known that Fidel Castro's dictatorship trained in Cuba<sup>1</sup> the Argentine guerrilla that was illegally fought, first by the Triple AAA (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) during the constitutional government of Isabel Martínez de Perón; and then by the military dictatorship (1976-1983), illegally and arbitrarily detaining, torturing, killing and disappearing political and social militants, intellectuals, journalists, and many of those who aspired to repeat the Cuban "revolutionary deed" in Argentina. Even among those who were disappeared and murdered in 1976 during the Argentine military dictatorship, the cases of two young Cuban diplomats, Crescencio Galañena Hernández and Jesús Cejas Arias, 27 and 22 years old, respectively, are recorded. However, despite the latter, Cuba did not break diplomatic relations with the Argentine government of the self-named "National Reorganization Process". In addition to Argentina, during that period Cuba only maintained diplomatic relations with five other Latin American countries: Colombia, Colombia, Colombia and Argentina.

Thus, the Argentine "anti-communist" military dictatorship was the only dictatorship in the Southern Cone that maintained diplomatic relations with the Cuban communist regime. This can be explained by a combination of

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1 Muchnik, Daniel and Pérez, Daniel: *Furia ideológica y violencia en la Argentina de los 70* (Ariel, 2007) and Masetti, Jorge (Jr.): *El furor y el delirio: Itinerario de un hijo de la Revolución cubana* (Tusquets, 1999).

concrete interests, which took precedence over its “principles”, and totally differentiated it from Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile.

So how did this situation come about? Cuba played an important role in the genesis of political violence in Argentina, but this did not prevent the two countries from maintaining a mutually convenient alliance between 1976 and 1983. This alliance was facilitated by the role played by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the Argentine Communist Party (PCA) and the participation of both non-democratic regimes in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

This alliance included the exchange of favors through support for candidacies in UN bodies and, most importantly, allowed the Argentine military dictatorship not to be condemned by the then UN Commission on Human Rights, based in Geneva.

What is striking is that relatives of the victims of State terrorism and -up until now unquestioned- referents of human rights in Argentina, exclude the “pragmatic” attitude of Fidel Castro from the Memory, Truth and Justice policy in the face of these documented facts. Only through “ideological blindness” can it be understood that the relatives of victims of State terrorism in Argentina continue to support the Cuban dictatorship that was an accomplice of the executioners of their loved ones, and that they decide to ignore or justify the current serious and systematic violations of Human Rights that are taking place on the island, according to numerous reports from both the Inter-American system and the universal system for the protection of Human Rights, as well as from prestigious international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

For example, last February 20, the head of the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Estela de Carlotto, received at the headquarters of her organization the Cuban ambassador in Argentina<sup>2</sup> and expressed via twitter: “Cuba

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2 <http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/es/articulo/visita-embajador-cubano-las-abuelas-de-plaza-de-mayo>



is an example, it is a country that has fought and continues to fight”<sup>3</sup>. Three years earlier she had received the former representative of the Cuban dictatorship and the Cuban Embassy in Argentina published: “Estela de Carlotto, president of this non-governmental organization and UN Human Rights Award 2003, took the opportunity to reiterate her admiration for the Cuban Revolution and especially for its leader, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro. The historic Argentine human rights activist recalled parts of her last visit to Cuba and highlighted the efforts made by the largest of the Antilles to guarantee its people full access to basic rights for any human being”<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, in its 2020 Annual Report, the prestigious international human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) included a categorical report on Cuba, in which it states: “The Cuban government continues to carry out arbitrary detentions to harass and intimidate critics, independent activists, political opponents, and others.... Security officials almost never present court orders to justify the detention of critics.... Police and state security agents continue to harass, mistreat and detain members of the Ladies in White (an organization founded by the wives, mothers and daughters of political prisoners)... The government controls virtually all of Cuba’s media and restricts access to information from abroad... Cubans who criticize the government continue to face the threat of criminal prosecution. They are not afforded due process, such as the right to be heard in public and fair hearings by a competent and impartial tribunal. In practice, the courts are subordinate to the executive and legislative branches (...) The Cuban government still does not recognize human rights advocacy as a legitimate activity, and denies legal status to local human rights organizations”<sup>5</sup>.

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3 <https://twitter.com/abuelasdifusion/status/1229871575433928705>

4 <http://misiones.minrex.gob.cu/es/articulo/sostiene-embajador-de-cuba-emotivo-en-encuentro-con-estela-de-carlotto>

5 Human Rights Watch: Cuba, eventos 2019 <https://www.hrw.org/es/world-report/2020/country-chapters/337309>

That is to say, Estela de Carlotto, whose action in Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo deserves respect and admiration, and representatives of other human rights organizations in Argentina that have played such an important role during our dictatorship deny, on the one hand, that Cuba was an accomplice of the military dictatorship and, at the same time, that human rights are violated in that country. Carlotto acknowledged, in an article she wrote following the death of Fidel Castro, that she was invited to Cuba in 1984, that is, after the return to democracy in Argentina.<sup>6</sup> Why does Carlotto not ask herself why she did not receive the “solidarity” of the revolution by inviting her to Cuba during the military dictatorship?

This report presents the facts, duly documented, with the aim of raising awareness among honest people, whatever their ideology, who are unaware of the relations between Cuba and the Argentine military dictatorship; to try to put aside what Robert Cox<sup>7</sup> has defined as “ideological blindness” (“This mental illness causes people to ignore what they do not want to see”), and to ensure that there are no double standards in judging authoritarian regimes, whatever their label, and that there are no aggravating or mitigating circumstances depending on the political color of such regimes

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6 Salvia, Gabriel C., *Fidel Castro y la integridad de Estela de Carlotto en la defensa de los derechos humanos*. <https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2016/11/30/fidel-castro-y-la-integridad-de-estela-de-carlotto-en-la-defensa-de-los-derechos-humanos/>

7 Cox, Robert: Prologue of the book *Otra grieta en la pared. Informe y testimonios de la nueva prensa cubana* by Fernando J. Ruiz (CADAL/KAS, 2003). <https://www.cadal.org/libros/?id=1520>

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## THE ROLE OF THE USSR AND THE PCA IN THE ARGENTINE-CUBAN ALLIANCE BETWEEN 1976-1983 FACING JIMMY CARTER

During the last military dictatorship, Argentina was the main exporter of grains to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), whose transactions were mainly channeled through Banco Credicoop, created on March 19, 1979 and linked to the Argentine Communist Party (PCA). In turn, the PCA considered dictator Jorge Rafael Videla a “dove” and the moderate alternative to the “Pinochetista” sectors of the military.

Both the role of the USSR and the PCA during the last Argentine military dictatorship are documented, as well as the important commercial exchanges that Argentina signed during that period with countries of the socialist bloc.<sup>8</sup> It is also well known the important role played by the US government of Jimmy Carter in denouncing human rights violations in Argentina and, in particular, the role played by his Secretary of Human Rights, Patricia Derian,<sup>9</sup> and the diplomat Allen “Tex” Harris,<sup>10</sup> the latter working at the US Embassy in Buenos Aires.

According to Isidoro Gilbert, “For the Soviet Union and the countries of the East, but also for Cuba and China, this pragmatic alliance with the Argentine military government was based on the assumption that they were confronting Carter’s foreign policy, which made the defense of human rights one of the tools used against the socialist countries. Whatever the internal opinion of the foreign ministries of these countries about the dictatorship, which was generally critical, it did not change the reality of support in those

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8 Ross, Greg: *Los derechos humanos y la política económica bajo la dictadura militar argentina, 1976-1983*. [https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento\\_154.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento_154.pdf)

9 Newspaper *La Nación*: *Patricia Derian: la funcionaria que enfrentó a la dictadura argentina*. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/el-mundo/patricia-derian-la-funcionaria-que-enfrento-a-la-dictadura-argentina-nid1901203>

10 Newspaper *Perfil*: *Murió Tex Harris, el diplomático que denunció los horrores de la dictadura argentina*. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/sociedad/murio-tex-harris-el-diplomatico-que-denuncio-los-horrores-de-la-dictadura-argentina.phtml>

places where the dictatorship was challenged. The saying that the enemy of my enemy is my friend came into play.”<sup>11</sup>

One piece of evidence in this regard is the complicity of the PCA with the military, documented in one of its minutes, in which it repudiates the U.S. policy of Jimmy Carter: “We feel obliged to point out that the Carter administration, set up as a supreme court that claims the right to judge the other nations of the world, has interfered in the internal affairs of our country, hypocritically using the argument of violation of human rights...”<sup>12</sup>.

Kezia McKeague argues that “For Argentina, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan led to improved commercial and political relations with the superpower. When the Argentine government refused to comply with the grain embargo enacted by the Jimmy Carter administration, exports from the USSR increased dramatically, solidifying Argentina’s position as Moscow’s most important trading ally in the region. While the Junta voted in the General Assembly to condemn the Soviet invasion and to boycott the Moscow Olympics, bilateral contacts increased in frequency and cordiality. This new level of cooperation was soon evident at the 1980 session of the Commission. In its efforts to prevent a resolution in support of Russian dissident Andrei Sakharov, Argentina joined Cuba as the only Latin American countries to support the Soviet Union.”<sup>13</sup>

Another interesting contribution on this subject is that of the Italian diplomat Enrico Calamai, who, as consul in Santiago de Chile and in Buenos Aires, did an excellent job of defending human rights and managed to save a significant number of lives. In a book dedicated to diplomacy,

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11 Gilbert, Isidoro: *La Fede, alistándose para la Revolución. La federación juvenil comunista 1921-2005* (Sudamericana, 2011)

12 Sigal, Jorge: *El día que maté a mi padre: Confesiones de un ex comunista*. (Sudamericana, 2006)

13 McKeague, Kezia F.: *Extraña alianza: relaciones cubano-argentinas en Ginebra, 1976-1983*. [https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento\\_50.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento_50.pdf)

human rights and the disappeared<sup>14</sup>, Calamai recalls that his brother was in charge of the foreign policy section of *Rinascita*, the magazine of the Italian Communist Party, and that he was sent to Chile and Argentina. Regarding the articles published by his brother, Calamai affirms that they had “an immediate and unexpected effect: the protests of the Argentine Communist Party, which, worried about its own political survival and the physical survival of its members, multiplied its contacts with Moscow and with sister parties, including the Italian one, to affirm that Videla was a moderate, the lesser evil in the current Argentine situation.”

Calamai also refers to the difficulty at the time of finding allies, among international organizations and embassies, willing to denounce the atrocities that were being committed in Argentina, highlighting the following: “Everyone comments on Moscow’s attitude, that is in great need of Argentine wheat and flirts with the Military Junta, while the Argentine Communist Party acts as an intermediary”. And he adds: “No one knocks on the door of the Soviet Embassy, because they know that they will be immediately handed over to the military”.

The complicity of the USSR and Cuba with the Argentine military dictatorship can be summed up in one sentence of the testimony given in 2003 by Héctor Timerman, as director of the magazine *Debate*: “I, who was a victim of human rights violations in Argentina, and as the son of a disappeared person who was lucky enough to survive the military dictatorship, can tell you that the countries that helped the most, the colleagues that helped the most to obtain the freedom of political prisoners in Argentina, were the media colleagues, such as the *New York Times*, *Le Monde*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica of Italy* and *El País* of Madrid. I have never heard of *Granma* or *Pravda* having any influence in the struggle for freedom of expression in Argentina. Because at the end of the day, there is no difference between the concept of the press that General Videla had and that of Fidel Castro.”<sup>15</sup>

14 Calamai, Enrico: *Razón de Estado. Perseguidos políticos argentinos sin refugio* (Asociación Cultural Toscana de Buenos Aires, 2007).

15 <https://www.cadal.org/videos/?id=3471>

## **ARGENTINA AND CUBA IN THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM), 1976-1983**

The Non-Aligned Movement was formally constituted at the First Summit Conference in Belgrade, held from September 1 to 6, 1961, with the participation of 25 member countries and 3 observers, with Cuba being the only Latin American country participating as member. Argentina became a member at the Algiers Conference in September 1973.

The NOAL was the ideal environment for the Argentine military dictatorship to gain international allies for the Malvinas cause, while at the same time shielding itself from criticism in the face of allegations of human rights violations.

For Kezia McKeague “Despite its ideological opposition to non-aligned objectives, the military junta had remained in the movement to gain the support of the numerically important group on issues such as human rights and the Falkland Islands. Its pragmatism was rewarded in 1979, as a Foreign Ministry report later acknowledged: ‘The evolution of Argentine participation in the Movement shows that it has been as a consequence of positive and fertile diplomatic activity that the Republic was able to obtain the necessary support for a decent treatment of the Argentine case in the Commission on Human Rights, as a consequence of the determined action in its favor by the Non-Aligned members of the Commission. This became evident at the 35th Session (February 1979) shortly after the attendance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vice Admiral Oscar Antonio Montes, at the Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Belgrade in July 1978.’”

One of the most reprehensible facts of Cuba’s complicity with the Argentine military dictatorship was Fidel Castro’s invitation to Jorge Rafael Videla to attend the NOAL summit in Havana in 1979. Several cables from the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the dictatorship, declassified by the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), bear witness to this.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Salvia, Gabriel C., «Para un dictador, nada mejor que otro dictador». [https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/11/26/actualidad/1417016947\\_741626.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/11/26/actualidad/1417016947_741626.html)

For example, the one that appears as File No.: 80AH002102\_235 and dated March 21, 1979 in Havana: “On this date I was summoned by Ambassador Carlos Amat Fores, Director of Latin America, who handed me a note informing me that this government has designated Francisco García Valls, Minister-President of the State Committee as personal representative of President Castro so that, with Amat himself and Ambassador Aragonés, they may interview His Excellency the President of the Republic in order to present Castro’s invitation to attend the sixth conference of the Non-Aligned Movement. The note indicates that the Cuban Foreign Ministry requests that the representative be received by the President on April 12. The communication also indicates that García will be able to inform the President or the officials he may indicate on the aspects of the conference, and receive opinions and criteria on the topics to be included in the final declaration and the resolutions to be adopted by the conference”.

Finally, Videla did not attend the Non-Aligned Summit in Havana, but an Argentine representation did, as recorded in a cable dated October 19, 1979: “Considering that between August 26 and September 7, the VI Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Countries was held in Havana (Cuba), and Considering: That the Argentine Republic is a member of said movement. That it was appropriate to accredit a delegation to represent the Republic at the conference. Therefore, The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship resolves: Article 1.- The designation of Commodore Carlos Roberto Francisco CAVANDOLI, Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, as president of the Argentine delegation, who attended the VI Summit of Non-Aligned Countries held in Havana (Cuba) from August 26 to September 7, 1979, is hereby validated. Article 2.- The appointment of Mr. Edgar Joaquín Flores Gómez, Embassy Counselor, and Mr. Carlos Arturo Francisco Spinosa, First Class Secretary, who accompanied the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs to the meeting referred to in Article 1 of this resolution, is hereby validated”. And Article 4 of the resolution stated: “Approve the allocation of the sum of one thousand five hundred U.S. dollars granted to the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs for courtesy and tribute, incidental and miscellaneous expenses, with the charge of rendering a documented account of its investment”.



**SECRETO (\*)**

AFRICAL  
CEREMONIAL  
LATINA  
ORGANISMOS  
15080-81-82.

NUMERO GENERAL DE RECEPCION:

ORIGEN: LA HABANA

Fecha y hora recepción D. T.:	DIA 21	MES 3	HORA 19.00
Fecha y hora tramitado D. C.:	DIA 23	MES 3	HORA 14.00

Cable N° 128/29/30

EN LA FECHA FUI CITADO POR EMBAJADOR CARLOS AMAT FORES, DIRECTOR AMERICA LATINA, QUIEN ME ENTREGO NOTA INFORMANDO ESTE GOBIERNO HA DESIGNADO A FRANCISCO GARCIA VALLS, MINISTRO -PRESIDENTE DEL COMITE ESTATAL COMO REPRESENTANTE PERSONAL DEL PRESIDENTE CASTRO PARA QUE, CON EL PROPIO AMAT Y EL EMBAJADOR ARAGONES ENTREVISTEN AL EX CELENTISIMO SENOR PRESIDENTE DE LA REPUBLICA A FIN PRESENTARLE LA INVITACION DE CASTRO PARA ASISTIR A LA SEXTA CONFERENCIA DE NO ALINEADOS.

EN LA NOTA SE SENALA QUE LA CANCELLERIA CUBNA RUEGA QUE EL REPRESENTANTE SEA RECIBIDO POR EL SENOR PRESIDENTE EL DIA DOCE DE ABRIL PROXIMO.

EN LA COMUNICACION SE INDICA ADEMAS QUE GARCIA PODRA INFORMAR AL SENOR PRESIDENTE O LOS FUNCIONARIOS QUE EL INDIQUE SOBRE LOS ASPECTOS DE LA CONFERENCIA, Y RECIBIR OPINIONES Y CRITERIOS SOBRE LOS TEMAS A INCLUIRSE EN LA DECLARACION FINAL Y LAS RESOLUCIONES QUE ADOPTE LA CONFERENCIA.

ME ACLARO AMAT QUE SOLICITUD FECHA FIJA SE DEBE AL FORZADO ITINERARIO PREVISTO.

SE RUEGA EN LA NOTA, POR ULTIMO, UNA RESPUESTA EN EL PLAZO MAS BREVE, A FIN EXAMINAR EVENTUALMENTE COMUN ACUERDO NUEVA FECHA U OTRAS ALTERNATIVAS PARA LA ENTREGA DE LA INVITACION.

NO ES DE DESCARTAR QUE PODRIAN CONSIDERARSE TEMAS RELACIONADOS CON LAS RELACIONES ECONOMICAS BILATERALES, DADO EL CARGO DEL REPRESENTANTE Y LA CIRCUNSTANCIA DE QUE ESTAN TRATANDOSE OPERACIONES QUE SUPERAN UN MONTO CIENTO MILLONES DOLARES. SUGIERO VER CABLE OCHO DEL CATORCE MARZO A GYNEH.  
SOLICITO INSTRUCCIONES.

CLEMENT.

M. A.  
C.

The 1979 NAM Summit in Havana produced a declaration that included a section on “Latin American Issues”, at the end of which it states: “Condemns the existence of military bases in Latin America and the Caribbean; supports the anti-colonial struggle of the peoples of the Caribbean, and, in particular, Puerto Rico, Belize, Guadeloupe, Martinique and French Guiana; welcomes the new Treaty on the Panama Canal; shows its concern for the situation in Chile; and salutes with satisfaction the victory of the people of Nicaragua and its vanguard, the Sandinista Front, over the dictatorship and imperialist intervention.”

As can be seen, there is no reference to the situation in Argentina, which implies a clear complicity and silence of NAM in general and Cuba in particular, regarding the military junta’s human rights violations.

At the same time, the part of the Declaration on “Non-Alignment Policy” formulates the opposition to the use of force and the support for the peaceful settlement of disputes. However, Cuba was the state that most enthusiastically supported the armed invasion of the Falkland Islands, initiated on April 2, 1982 by the Argentine military dictatorship, which included a warm reception in Havana for the then Argentine Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Méndez.<sup>17</sup> Where, then, was Cuba’s opposition to the use of force and support for the peaceful settlement of disputes? Beyond the honor owed to the heroic action of combatant and fallen soldiers, clearly the beginning of the Malvinas war was an irresponsible adventure of the Dictatorship, which was not interested in recovering the sovereignty of the Islands, but in consolidating itself on the domestic political front with the aim of perpetuating itself in power.

On the Argentine-Cuban alliance between 1976-1983, it is worth quoting the speech of Reynaldo Benito Bignone, de facto president in the final stage of the Argentine military dictatorship, during the seventh Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in 1983 in New Delhi.

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17 Costa Méndez en Cuba junto a No Alineados, 2 al 4 de junio de 1982: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4HysCLVzZw>

On the one hand, Bignone formulates some exculpatory expressions that in no way differ from those of Fidel Castro: “Madam President, allow me to point out the attitude in which industrialized countries incur for political purposes when applying coercive measures of an economic nature against developing countries. A practice to which the Argentine Republic has been subjected. The Latin American countries have repeatedly maintained, within the Latin American Economic System (SELA), that all nations have the sovereign right to follow their own economic, social and political path in peace and freedom, free from external pressures, aggressions and threats. Expressing their solidarity with member states and other developing countries, they condemned such practices and demanded the elimination of embargoes, blockades and all other illegal and arbitrarily applied coercive measures aimed at undermining and preventing the affected countries from fully exercising their national sovereignty over their territories and resources and obstructing their economic and social policies. This Latin American position should inspire us to once again affirm, within the movement of non-aligned countries, our rejection of economic aggression and our specific condemnation of the application of coercive, arbitrary and illegal economic measures for political purposes”.

On the other hand, it is striking that human rights organizations in Argentina have never criticized Fidel Castro for his silence regarding what Bignone said at the summit: “Madam President, I wish to emphasize that I represent a government that had to assume power in circumstances in which the legal order, the political process and the social dynamics were at the mercy of terrorist chaos that even endangered the very viability of Argentina as an organized society. The aggression carried out by this artful enemy was defeated and the destructive actions and constant threats to peace and security were left behind”.

Finally, after his speech at the Summit, Bignone answered questions from Argentine journalists in New Delhi. In one of them he was asked about Argentina’s presence at the Non-Aligned Summit and the gratitude he expressed to Cuba. In his answer, Bignone said: “I am going straight

to the hard facts: Fidel Castro, Head of State, outgoing president of the Non-Aligned Movement to which we have belonged since 1964 and then as a full member, was very emphatic, categorical and deployed a lot of action on an issue that really interests us, hurts us and we want to move forward, as you know, the Malvinas issue. And, furthermore, allow me to say that he himself had the courage to state that this went beyond the ideological differences which, of course, exist between the regime presided over by Fidel Castro and the Argentine regime”.

**PINOCHET YES, VIDELA NO: CUBA'S ROLE VIS-À-VIS THE DIFFERENT TREATMENT OF THE ARGENTINEAN AND CHILEAN MILITARY DICTATORSHIPS IN GENEVA**

The scholarly research by Kezia McKeague details the complicity of Fidel Castro's regime with the Argentine military dictatorship and highlights how it differed from the Pinochet dictatorship. There, McKeague notes that “The multiple sources of Cuban-Argentine cooperation can best be understood by examining the contrast with Cuban policy toward Chile. The Chilean military regime became a pariah of the United Nations, subject to country-specific investigations and several public condemnations. Cuba, along with the rest of the socialist bloc and most of the non-aligned countries, consistently voted in favor of these condemnatory resolutions. The difference with Argentina was not related to the two countries' human rights issues, as the repression in Argentina was even more far-reaching (though more hidden) than in Chile.”

This was made very clear at the start of the first sessions of the new United Nations Human Rights Council, where several representatives spoke in Geneva at the “High-level Segment” between June 19 and 30, 2006. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the interventions of Paulina Veloso, then Minister Secretary of the Presidency of Chile, and Jorge Taiana, then Foreign Minister of Argentina.

The Chilean official, Paulina Veloso, stated the following: “I would like to take this opportunity to give special recognition to the work carried

out by the Human Rights Commission during its sixty years of existence. Among the Commission's achievements, we must undoubtedly highlight the special procedures, which were decisive in helping our country overcome a dark period in its history, when Chile's democracy was abruptly interrupted and serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms were committed".

And then she added: "It is with great emotion that I address this assembly to thank and give personal testimony about the work carried out, in relation to my country, by the Commission on Human Rights. In 1977, my husband Alexei Jaccard, a Swiss-Chilean student at the University of Geneva, was made to disappear in Argentina as part of 'Operation Condor', carried out jointly by the Chilean and Argentinean police. Then, when I was 20 years old, I was welcomed and supported by the Special Rapporteur for Chile, Mr. Abdoulaye Dièye, and by the Director of the then Human Rights Division, Mr. Theo van Boven. Although these approaches did not have concrete results, the Commission's effort to claim the rights of the disappeared, together with international condemnation, had a dissuasive impact that may have reduced the number of disappeared. In those moments of loneliness and anguish, that interest of the Commission meant for me a strong support that gave me the strength to continue trusting in people, in human rights and in the organized community that defends them".

In contrast to the recognition made by Paulina Veloso, the most interesting part of the speech of the former Foreign Minister of the Argentine Republic was when he recalled the following: "The Commission that is ending its functions today was indeed many times politicized, ineffective and inoperative. In fact, my country suffered from this politicization, when under a bipolar balance that was indifferent to human rights, the massive and systematic violations of human rights in Argentina during the military dictatorship were never considered by the plenary of this Commission".

The relatives of the victims of human rights violations in Argentina should ask themselves the following question: Why was the Pinochet

dictatorship condemned and Argentina was not? Really, those who are interested in “the fight against impunity: memory, truth, justice and reparation” should demand explanations from the Cuban government, because if the Pinochet dictatorship was condemned in Geneva, while the Argentine military were spared from such international condemnation, it was partly due to the intervention of the Cuban regime.

Kezia McKeague makes further arguments in this regard: “Cuba and Argentina cooperated in the Human Rights Commission despite their conspicuous ideological differences. Why did a communist regime support a fervently anti-communist military junta whose main objective was to eliminate leftist subversion? And she adds: “the military regime actively sought allies such as Cuba to avoid the international isolation experienced by Chile. Facing criticism from European governments and the Carter administration, typical alliances were reversed in Geneva, with an anti-communist, pro-Western junta turning to socialist and developing countries for protection from human rights issues. Cuba’s simultaneous membership in the Latin American bloc, the socialist camp and the non-aligned movement put it in a particularly influential position for Argentina’s interests.”

Mc Keague notes that “A basic convergence of interests made Cuba willing to condone Argentina’s human rights violations, although other pragmatic motivations that had little to do with human rights determined the disparate treatment of Argentina and Chile”.

Graciela Fernández Meijide, in her book “The Intimate History of Human Rights in Argentina”<sup>18</sup>, dedicated to Pablo, her disappeared son, describes the following: “The day the final discussion on the continuity or suppression of the Working Group on Disappearances took place, from the beginning we saw it go back and forth from one end of the table to the other

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18 Fernández Meijide, Graciela: *La historia íntima de los derechos humanos en la Argentina*. (Sudamericana, 2009)

in a horseshoe shape,<sup>19</sup> with messages from the Argentine delegation to the Soviet Union delegation and vice versa. The ambassador of that country proposed to terminate the work of the group, arguing that the \$500,000 required to sustain it was an excessive sum for the UN. He received the expected support but, fortunately, the votes in favor of the continuation of the group were more numerous and those present, with their headphones on and their eyes on the protagonists, experienced the result as a victory over the dictatorship. At the end of the session, I approached the Cuban delegate—her last name was Flores—and complained about her lack of solidarity with the suffering of the disappeared and their families. I think she felt bad, or so it seemed to me. However, ideological discipline prevailed over her sensitivity”.

Previously, Fernandez Mejjide quoted in her book an interview with the Dutch diplomat Theo Van Boven, who was president of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva: “The main problem was that the relationship between the East and West blocs completely covered this issue. The case of Chile was easier to introduce than that of Argentina, because Pinochet installed a clearly anti-communist dictatorship. Argentina, on the other hand, had a very good relationship with the Soviet Union and had not banned the Communist Party. The Soviets protected Argentine interests and were clearly against any resolution condemning the Argentine dictatorship, along with other African and Arab countries”<sup>20</sup>.

McKeague concludes by stating that “As one of the most influential, if controversial, members of the nonaligned countries in the Commission, Cuba played an important role in the nonaligned movement’s defense of the Argentine regime. The Cuban government maintained an active delegation since becoming a member of the Commission in 1976, while its election to the presidency of the nonaligned movement in 1979 raised its profile among

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19 This refers to an advisor to Gabriel Martinez, Ambassador of the Argentine military dictatorship to the UN headquarters in Geneva.

20 Interview with Theo Van Boven in the newspaper *Página 12*, March 8 2006: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/dialogos/21-66607-2006-05-08.html>

developing countries. Along with improved relations with the Soviet Union in the late 1970s, this leadership position also established Cuba as a negotiating agent between the developed world and the socialist bloc.”

For Gabriel Martinez, McKeague adds, “Cuba also acted as an ‘interlocutor’ between the Argentine delegation and those from Eastern Europe. When Martinez needed to pass a message to an Eastern bloc country, he would usually ask the Cuban ambassador to be his messenger. Cuba also helped arrange meetings of the non-aligned delegates on behalf of Argentina. Such favors reflected a relationship between the Cuban and Argentine representatives in Geneva that Martinez describes as ‘optimal’ and ‘extremely close’. Unconcerned about ideological differences, the support was mutual, according to Martinez. ‘The Cubans always, always supported us, and we supported them.’ This support from Cuba and the other nonaligned and socialist countries in the Commission proved crucial in February 1979.”

#### **EXCHANGE OF VOTES AT THE UN REFLECTING “THE CORDIAL RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.”**

Another example of the good relations between the Argentine and Cuban dictatorships between 1976-1983 were the exchanges of support for membership in UN organizations, including the support of Fidel Castro’s government for Argentina to be re-elected to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), during the 32nd General Assembly of the United Nations in 1977, to fill one of the three vacancies in the Latin American Group (GRULA) for a three-year term beginning in 1978.

The Argentine diplomacy made an important deployment to achieve his reelection and several cables document the formal support received for his candidacy. In a cable signed by Ambassador Julio Barboza, Head of the International Organizations Department, it was assured that Argentina’s re-election to the ECOSOC had the support of: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti,



Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, which added to that of Argentina itself reached 18 votes.

The only Latin American country that did not support Argentina's candidacy was Venezuela, arguing that it had already pledged its votes in favor of the candidacies of Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago. Venezuela, it should be remembered, was one of the most solidary Latin American countries regarding human rights violations during the last military dictatorship, taking in thousands of politically persecuted people.

In the end, Argentina obtained 113 votes, second only to Trinidad and Tobago with 117, while Ecuador obtained 86 and the Dominican Republic 84. With a required majority of 96 votes, only Trinidad and Tobago and Argentina were declared elected.

A later cable from the Argentine Foreign Ministry makes the following analysis of that vote: "The result must be considered satisfactory for Argentina since, although we obtained second place, our reelection to this important body was not in danger: We received seventeen votes more than the minimum of two thirds required; we obtained twenty-seven votes more than the country that obtained third place". The cable adds that "However, thirty countries out of 143 did not vote for Argentina", which it attributes, among other reasons, to "Possible unfavorable attitude to Argentina's election by certain countries due to: 1) Our position in the United Nations in the field of Human Rights (Nordic countries)".

Cuba cared nothing for the human rights situation in Argentina, including the disappearance of two of its diplomats in the country, and expressed its support for the candidacy of the military dictatorship in the following note, dated September 6, 1977, addressed to Vice Admiral Oscar Antonio Montes, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship of the Argentine Republic, in Buenos Aires: "Mr. Minister, I have the honor to address you for the purpose of informing you that the Government of the Republic of Cuba has decided to support the aspiration of the Argentine Republic to be re-elected as a member of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) during the

elections of the XXXII session of the United Nations. I take this opportunity, Mr. Minister, to reiterate to you the assurances of my high consideration”.

On September 10, 1977, the Argentine Foreign Ministry responded as follows: “the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship –Department of International Organizations presents its compliments to the Embassy of Cuba and is pleased to refer to its note No. 86, dated September 6, 1977, in which it communicates the decision of the Government of Cuba to support the candidacy of Argentina for re-election as a member of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations during the elections to be held during the XXXII session. In this regard, this Foreign Ministry is pleased to express its gratitude for the valuable support given by the government of your country to the Argentine candidacy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Department of International Organizations reiterates to the Embassy of Cuba the assurances of its highest consideration.

Previously, on April 14, 1977, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship –Department of International Organizations– addressed a letter to the Embassy of Cuba, Buenos Aires, in which it “presents its compliments to the Embassy of Cuba and is pleased to refer to the note verbale of that Representation No. 7 as well as to No. 608 of this Ministry, related to the request for support in favor of the Cuban candidacy to the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (WHO). In this regard, it brings to your knowledge that the Argentine Government welcomes the aforementioned aspiration and, in view of the fact that the Republic is also running for re-election to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), it suggests, given the cordial relations existing between both countries, an exchange of votes that would strengthen the possibilities of the respective candidacies”.

EMBAJADA DE CUBA  
BUENOS AIRES

86

REPUBLICA ARGENTINA
MINISTERIO DE ECONOMIA
9 SET 1977
NÚMERO CITABE 14241



Buenos Aires, 6 de septiembre de 1977

Señor Ministro:

Tengo el honor de dirigirme a usted a los efectos de comunicarle que el Gobierno de la República de Cuba ha decidido otorgar su apoyo a la aspiración de la República Argentina a ser reelecta como miembro del Consejo Económico y Social (ECOSOC) durante las elecciones del XXXII Período de Sesiones de las Naciones Unidas.

Aprovecho la oportunidad, Señor Ministro, para reiterar le el testimonio de mi más alta consideración.

A Su Excelencia el Vicealmirante D. Oscar Antonio Montes  
Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto de la  
República Argentina  
Buenos Aires

ECOSOC/12/1

COMISIÓN NACIONAL DE ECONOMÍA
8 SET 1977
MESA DE ENTRADAS Y SALIDAS



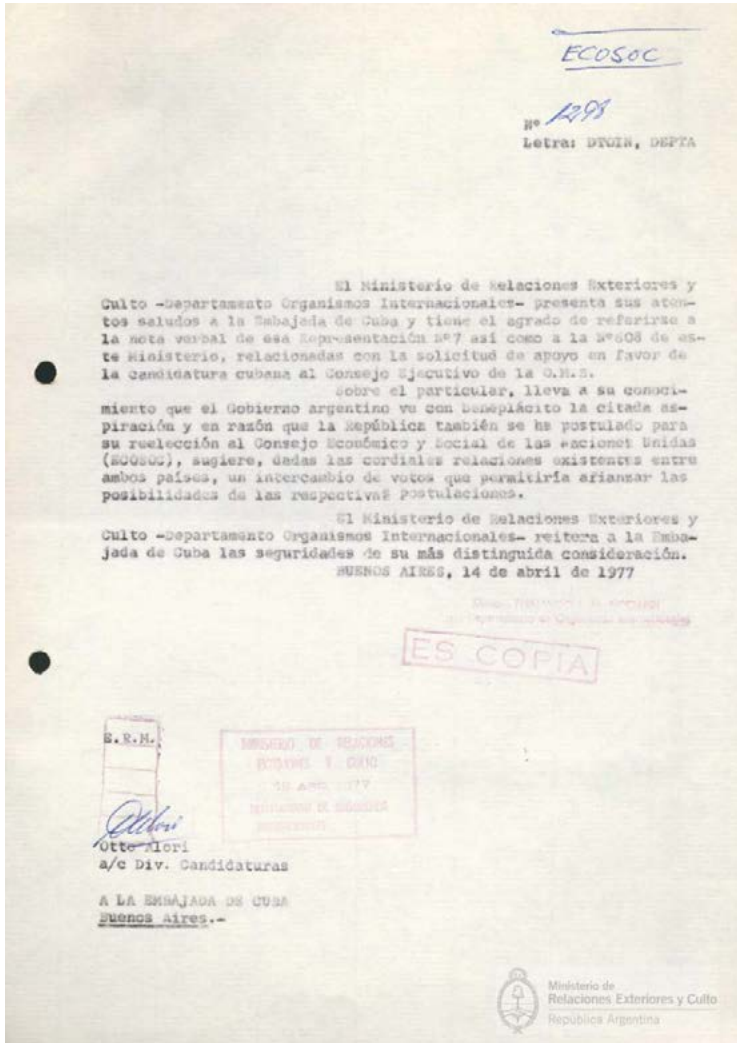
Ministerio de  
Relaciones Exteriores y Culto  
República Argentina

Cuba also requested support from the Videla dictatorship for its candidacy for membership in the UN Commission on International Trade Law, and in May 1977 Argentina supported Cuba's candidacy for WHO membership before receiving Cuba's response to its request for support for Argentina's re-election to ECOSOC.

Incidentally, Argentine diplomacy also agreed on reciprocal support with Chile, which aspired to a place in ECOSOC, and maintained a very pragmatic foreign policy, clearly prioritizing interests over principles. Even with Cuba, it was all pragmatism, since a cable from Havana dated January 12, 1978 on "invitations extended to governments, armed forces and parties of friendly countries" states that the entire socialist group -with the exception of China, Cambodia and Albania- "Progressive" African countries and all Latin American countries with which Cuba maintains relations were included, with the "only exclusion of Argentina". The cable mentions that the meeting was attended by representatives of the Argentine Communist Party Arnedo Alvarez and Pedro Tadioli, Secretary of the Buenos Aires Province Committee, and that Western Europe, Japan and Canada were also excluded. The cable clarifies that the mechanism of invitations was concentrated in the Government and the Central Committee, and the local Foreign Ministry expressed the belief that Argentina had been included.

Something similar to the above is indicated in a cable dated February 1979, in which the Argentine diplomat Molina Salas states that he met with the director of Latin America of the Cuban Foreign Ministry, at the latter's request, who gave him documentation on the organization of the Non-Aligned summit conference in Havana. The Argentine diplomat points out that "At the end of the conference and as a casual and friendly comment, he told me that high spheres had decided not to invite the Argentine government to the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the revolution in order to avoid situations that could eventually be uncomfortable given the nature of the celebrations". And the Argentine diplomat added: "It is thus clear that Cuba does not include the Argentine government among those described as 'friends'".

The Cuban diplomat was very clear in proposing “to avoid situations that could eventually be uncomfortable given the nature of the celebrations”, since it meant too much whitewashing of a very pragmatic relationship of mutual convenience between a communist regime and an anti-communist one.



## **HOW MUCH OF A HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE ARE ARGENTINEAN ORGANIZATIONS?**

After the documentation presented, the brazenness of the Cuban president appointed by Raúl Castro, Miguel Díaz-Canel, who, taking advantage of his trip to Buenos Aires to attend the presidential inauguration of Alberto Fernández, visited the Parque de la Memoria, which commemorates “the victims of State terrorism, detainees-disappeared and murdered, and those who died fighting for the same ideals of justice and equity”<sup>21</sup>, is striking.

The apprentice dictator laid flowers at the foot of the plaque of the two young Cuban diplomats murdered in 1976 by the military dictatorship in Argentina, Crescencio Galañena Hernández and Jesús Cejas Arias. Nobody reproached Díaz-Canel for the fact that despite the disappearance of its diplomats, Cuba did not break off relations with Argentina -as it did with Chile- and, above all, that it maintained a more than friendly relationship with the military dictatorship.

But what is most worrying is that among the traditional Argentine human rights organizations, which were formed during Isabel’s government and later during the dictatorship, there is not a single voice that reminds the Cuban regime of its complicity with the military dictatorship and at the same time denounces the ongoing systematic violations of fundamental freedoms in Cuba, a country that has not even ratified the two most important international conventions on human rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Indeed, having received so much international democratic solidarity, local human rights bodies have been consistent in their ingratitude, remaining indifferent to people in different parts of the world suffering from repressive regimes. Unfortunately, the list of remnant autocracies is too long: North Korea, China, Cuba, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Saudi

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21 Salvia, Gabriel C., *La desmemoria de Díaz-Canel y los organismos de DD.HH.* [https://www.clarin.com/opinion/desmemoria-diaz-canel-organismos-dd-hh-\\_0\\_PtGhTXhS.html](https://www.clarin.com/opinion/desmemoria-diaz-canel-organismos-dd-hh-_0_PtGhTXhS.html)

Arabia, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Laos, Bahrain, Sudan, Venezuela, Russia and Nicaragua, to mention a few cases about which no pronouncement will ever be heard from Argentina's historic human rights organizations.

In Tibet alone, the Chinese Communist Party regime has already murdered 1.2 million people.

One response to this inconsistency is the defense by these local organizations of the human rights establishment of political violence in the 1970s, nothing less than of "ideals" contrary to civil and political liberties, that is, democracy. That is why they defend Cuba's one-party regime and its human rights-violating state policy, and do the same with Venezuela and other dictatorships that are the product of that "ideological blindness" so well defined by journalist Robert Cox.

A fundamental principle of human rights activism is that no double standards should be applied in judging authoritarian regimes regardless of whether they respond to left-wing or right-wing traditions. Human rights organizations must ensure the protection of human rights everywhere, given their universal character, and not only in those places where they are violated by governments with which they have no ideological affinities, and also consider that international democratic solidarity has as its priority those countries in which freedom of association, expression, assembly, protest and the right to political participation are repressed, i.e. dictatorships.





05-21-2021

# The limits of the human rights foreign policy and the importance of international democratic solidarity

## INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations on December 10th 1948 established a clear limit on the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of States, especially in its sections 2, 28 and 30.

Section 2 reads:

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.”<sup>1</sup>

Section 28 in turn provides as follows: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”<sup>2</sup>. And, finally, section 30 specifies that: “Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State,

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1 UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, A/RES/217(III), December 10th 1948.

2 Ibid.

group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.”<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the supremacy of human rights over state sovereignty, Václav Havel has pointed out that:

“I am not against the institution of the State as such. I am talking about the real existence of something that is more valuable than the State. That something is humanity. The State serves the people, not the other way round. If someone serves their State, they should do so only as necessary for the state to provide a good service for all its citizens. Human rights are above state rights. In the international law, the provisions that protect human beings should take precedence over the provisions that protect the State.”<sup>4</sup>

Along the same lines, the then federal president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Joachim Gauck, stated that “transcending borders is necessary to impose human rights in the way intended by the international community: with universal validity, without limitations and conditions and for all human beings, simply because they are human beings”<sup>5</sup>.

While many democratic countries declare officially, through their foreign offices’ websites, that promoting and defending human rights is one of the main goals of their foreign policy, in practice it is a merely declarative and, in some cases, demagogic statement.

Therefore, civil society the one in charge of leading the international defense of human rights, denouncing governments with state policies that criminalize fundamental freedoms and pressing democratic countries to speak up and demand change. In this regard, together with prestigious

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3 *Ibid.*

4 Václav Havel, *A Limited Sovereignty*, *La Nación* newspaper, March 9th 2000, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/8336-una-soberania-limitada>.

5 *Human Beings for Human Rights*, 2014, Department of State, Federal Republic of Germany.

international human rights organizations founded in Europe and the United States, the civil society that has emerged over the last decades in countries that have lived under a dictatorship, or authoritarian governments in general, has the authority and moral obligation to become, from other regions in the world, the voice of those who have no voice and speak out for others who cannot do so for themselves.

Human rights activists that experienced the military dictatorships of the Southern Cone, South Africa and the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe recognize that the democratic solidarity received from other countries during the periods of repression and political persecution was as a key source of moral support. Also the committed support of leaders from democratic countries and international organizations was crucial as they denounced human rights violations and absence of freedom in countries governed by dictatorial regimes. Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are an example of this, which now would put their governments in a position to take on a regional and international leadership role in the promotion and protection of human rights.

International democratic solidarity, in its role as moral support for those who live in countries ruled by dictatorships and pressure for their illegitimate authorities, is a critical element to promote respect for fundamental rights in these places, and it becomes even more important since in practice democracies have no specific state policy regarding this matter.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS IN FOREIGN POLICY**

Foreign policy is defined as “any activity carried out by a State in its dealings with other nations, conducted or implemented through regular or traditional diplomatic channels (i.e. foreign affairs agencies or departments) or other official means”<sup>6</sup>.

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6 Anaya Muñoz, Alejandro, *Human Rights in and from International Relations* (CIDE, 2014).

The inclusion of human rights in a country's foreign policy has an impact on how the country explains its internal situation and votes at meetings of intergovernmental organizations (IGO); on its involvement in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of other States at the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the United Nations (UN); on the inclusion of topics on the global agenda; and on the activism to defend democracy and fundamental freedoms.

The explanation of a country's internal situation before IGOs includes all members of the UN, and also regional organizations such as, for example, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the European Union (EU).

On the other hand, since the UN's HRC was created in 2006, all member states are required to go through a Universal Periodic Review (UPR), which includes a country report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Every country submits its own report and during an interactive meeting, they receive feedback, recommendations and observations from other member states.

In addition, if a country is a member of the HRC or other IGO where situations involving human rights in other countries are voted on, the country's position (for, against, abstention or absence) will be part of their human rights foreign policy, and the same will happen if they participate with observations or recommendations in the UPRs of other countries.

In other words, regardless of their political regime –from the most vigorous democracies to the most closed dictatorships– all States are required to go through the UPR process and participate in the evaluation of other countries through the same periodic review, as well as to vote on resolutions of the HRC regarding situations in specific countries or other issues. Consequently, even if they do not want to, human rights become part of their foreign policy.

Now, any action undertaken in connection with the political and human rights situation of other countries means intervening in their domestic affairs and expressing an opinion on that matter. However, almost all countries that include human rights in their foreign policy contradict themselves when

they add the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other nations. When a country expresses an opinion about the human rights situation in another country, it is necessarily intervening in its foreign policy. This type of intervention is defined by the jurist Martin Farrell as weak: "... it is limited to criticizing the internal politics of a foreign State and advising that State to help it improve their politics". According to Farrell: "A weak intervention hardly requires any justification"<sup>7</sup>. Other interventions involve economic sanctions and, the most extreme of them is the military intervention, which is associated with the right to protect<sup>8</sup>.

Some democratic countries have chosen a specific topic as a State policy to include in the global agenda, but they have not been able to adopt a foreign policy that actively defends democracy and fundamental freedoms and is aimed at supporting human rights activists in other countries. This would imply taking section 27 of the Universal Declaration on Democracy as a guide:

"A democracy should support democratic principles in international relations. In that respect, democracies must refrain from undemocratic conduct, express solidarity with democratic governments and non-State actors like non-governmental organizations that work for democracy and human rights, and extend solidarity to those who are victims of human rights violations at the hands of undemocratic regimes"<sup>9</sup>.

A foreign policy active in human rights requires a committed diplomacy, that is, public servants that are instructed to provide recognition, support and protection to human rights activists in countries governed by dictatorships. The Swedish diplomat Harald Edelstam, who was considered a hero

7 Martín D. Farrell, *Ethics in Domestic and International Relations*, Barcelona, GEDISA, 2003, page 258.

8 See also the essay written by Julio Montero, in this same volume.

9 World Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, adopted in El Cairo, on September 16th 1997, <http://archive.ipu.org/cnl-e/161-dem.htm>.

during the beginning of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile, pointed out that “modern diplomats should not only go to parties and meet upper-class people. They should have contact with regular people, labor unions, the opposition, when there is a regime against the people. And they should be brave and get involved in social issues. I believe this is very important for diplomats nowadays. I believe it is worth the cost”<sup>10</sup>.

Another hero during the military dictatorships of Chile and Argentina, the Italian diplomat Enrico Calamai, said: “I was able to verify the real possibilities of humanitarian intervention offered by the privileges and immunity granted by the international law. I imagine a diplomatic corps that uses them based on the values of the civil society”. And he added: “Diplomatic intelligence should find a way to come between the brutality of the State and its victims; the State, only worried about suppressing any opposition to the government’s policies, and the victims, looking for any open door for their physical survival”<sup>11</sup>.

However, what abounds in any diplomacy that performs functions in countries ruled by dictatorships –as was the case in Argentina– is indifference. According to Calamai, “the temptation to act as if nothing happened is strong (...). There is a way to stop feeling guilty: do something. Share my privileges with those wandering around the city crying for help”. And he concludes: “There is an instinctive strength that pushes a normal man to help someone in danger (...). In my opinion, the other people are not normal; they do not see or they pretend they do not see, or what is even worse, they do not do anything although they see”<sup>12</sup>.

In short, when a democratic country speaks about national interest, it cannot exclude from that interest the international defense of human dignity. This implies adopting what is now known as “the principle of

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10 *The Black Carnation*, a movie directed by Ulf Hultberg (Sweden, 2007).

11 Enrico Calamai, *State Reason: Politically Persecuted Argentines without Refuge*, Buenos Aires Tuscan Cultural Association, 2007, page 100.

12 Cited in *ibid.*, pages 130 and 203.

non-indifference” in foreign policy, the original definition of which may be attributed to the former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, who at the beginning of his administration in a speech at the University of Notre Dame, said: “Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere.”<sup>13</sup>

### **REQUIREMENTS, LIMITATIONS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR A HUMAN RIGHTS FOREIGN POLICY**

The first requirement is to respect human rights in one’s own country, that is, to have moral authority to be able to give an opinion about the situation in other countries. Therefore, a human rights foreign policy would be limited to countries with high standards of internal respect for civil and political freedoms. And even if these countries experience cases of human rights violations, such as police brutality, the important thing is to expose them and prevent them from going unpunished. Quite a different thing is the case of defective democracies with a long history of murdering journalists and human rights activists, that is, serious situations that prevent them from having the necessary leadership to condemn situations in other countries. However, their commitment to the universal human rights system and the establishment of standing and open invitations to the United Nations’ special procedures enable also these defective democracies to express an opinion on serious situations in other countries.

Therefore, while human rights foreign policies are from this point of view limited to democracies, democracies have certain disadvantages when compared to dictatorships, which is important that they condemn and feel “embarrassed” about. In democratic countries, the government’s priorities lie with its domestic issues, since political leaders need to respond to their citizens’ demands in general and that of their voters who have elected them in particular. In addition, in a democracy, different governments hold office

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13 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*, Bogota, Pontifical Xavierian University, 2015, page 180.

as a result of competitive elections and new authorities may mean both a change in the country's foreign policy and a change in government officials, which may affect its international commitment to defending human rights. Conversely, dictatorships remain in power indefinitely and they attach great importance to obtaining international legitimization in order to secure their internal repression. An example of this is the relevance that countries like China and Cuba place upon being part of the United Nations' HRC<sup>14</sup>.

The second requirement for a foreign policy focused on human rights is its general application, which means not having "double standards". This almost never happens in any country in the world. The "national interest" associated with economic factors is given greater priority, which means that countries care more about exporting products and attracting foreign investment, forming geopolitical alliances and any other issues that may be relevant to get international support. Many democratic countries exchange favors with dictatorial governments. China is the most obvious example, though not the only one, where the economic interest prevails over the international commitment to defending human rights. We should take into account, also, that the most powerful dictatorial government on earth takes in retaliation measures such as ceasing to buy certain products, to offer loans and to make investments. The point is that, for instance, it seems contradictory to actively denounce the Venezuelan dictatorship and at the same time have ties with China, ignoring the human rights situation there, as if in both cases we were not talking about people and –besides– allied countries.

Consequently, democratic countries need to find alternatives to their international commitment to defending human rights if they really consider it a top priority of their foreign policy. One option is to determine where to do this from. Is it compatible that the ministries of Foreign Affairs encourage trade with a country and at the same time denounce that country for

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14 Gabriel C. Salvia, *The Council's Chairs. Authoritarianism and Democracy and the Evolution of the UN Human Rights Division*, Center for Latin American Openness and Development (CADAL) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2020, <https://www.cadal.org/informes/pdf/Las-sillas-del-Consejo.pdf>.



human rights violations or receive its political opponents? Does the Human Rights office need to be an address or a subdivision of the Foreign Office so as to stress its importance in the country's foreign policy? Or would it be more convenient that the national human rights department had an agency especially created for the purpose of promoting human rights and democratic solidarity worldwide? In this last case, the dictatorships' embassies would not be precisely interested in having relationships with an agency that they don't have locally and democratic countries would be able to address their two goals through different government areas.

Another option is a human rights parliamentary diplomacy, as it is an independent branch of the government, which a dictatorship does not have either. For instance, the national legislators may submit projects condemning human rights violations in dictatorial regimes and demand statements from their respective governments at intergovernmental organizations; denounce election processes that are not free, fair and transparent in autocratic regimes; acknowledge the activities and initiatives of democratic activists in danger; and become a hub for political dissidents from that country.

There is also the interesting example of Germany's Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance, created in November 1998, that operates under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its creation was based on the following principle:

“Protecting human rights and promoting universal respect for them is a cornerstone of German foreign policy. In the international arena, the German government's efforts are aimed not only at creating an international institutional and political framework for the protection of human rights but also –and most importantly– at protecting victims and potential victims of human rights abuses. In practice, this means that protecting human rights is a task which involves all areas of our foreign policy”<sup>15</sup>.

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15 <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aamt/koordinatoren/mr-koordinatorin/uebersicht/228992>.

Therefore, the Commissioner works closely with many other institutions that are actively involved in human rights and humanitarian aid initiatives, including other ministries, the Parliament, parliamentary groups, subnational States, the Humanitarian Aid Coordinating Committee, political and private foundations, and national and international non-governmental organizations<sup>16</sup>.

### **REMEMBRANCE AS THE BASIS FOR A FOREIGN POLICY ACTIVE IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY: THE ARGENTINE CASE**

During the last military dictatorship in Argentina, it was very important to see signs of international democratic solidarity, mainly from the Jimmy Carter administration in the United States, the role of a number of foreign diplomats in Buenos Aires, the support to local human rights organizations and even the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Adolfo Pérez Esquivel.

Samuel Moyn considers the 1970s as a crucial decade for human rights because of how the situation in the military dictatorships of Latin America was addressed, as well as in the countries of the socialist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, and in the Soviet Union itself<sup>17</sup>.

In Argentina, the Jimmy Carter administration played a key role in denouncing violations of fundamental rights, particularly the Secretary of State for Human Rights, Pat Derian, and Allen “Tex” Harris, the American diplomat appointed for the US Embassy in Buenos Aires. In addition to addressing reports on disappearances at the embassy and joining the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo demonstration outside the national government office, the Casa Rosada, Harris managed to get a loan for the Argentine Army in exchange for accepting a visit of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The visit, which took place in September 1979, was

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16 *Ibidem*.

17 Samuel Moyn, *op. cit.*

a turning point in the Argentine military dictatorship<sup>18</sup>. When he passed away in February 2020, the Argentine Foreign Office issued the following statement:

“Tex Harris was foreign-service officer in Argentina from 1977 to 1979, a period during which he opened the doors of the US Embassy to the relatives of victims of enforced disappearance and tried to help them find their loved ones. During this period, he filed 13,500 complaints about human rights violations and exposed to the world what was going on in our country, through detailed reports prepared based on a collection of testimonies. He was decorated for his outstanding service by the Nestor Kirchner administration, receiving a medal of the San Martín Liberator Order in 2004”<sup>19</sup>.

In addition to Harris, Italy’s consul Enrico Calamai and Canada’s ambassador, Dwight Fulford<sup>20</sup>, as well as diplomats from France and Sweden, were recognized for their humanitarian work in Argentina during the military dictatorship.

On the other hand, despite the enforced disappearances, the illegal detentions and the acts of torture, during the Argentine military dictatorship, several human rights organizations were able to operate legally –with legal personality– and receive foreign aid. For example, the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH), founded in 1975, received strong support from the World Council of Churches, which also helped the Mothers of the Plaza

18 Roberto Álvarez, *40 Years of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) Visit in Argentina (CIDH)*, Documents, Year XVII, Number 79, September 24th 2019, [https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento\\_PD\\_79.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/documentos/Documento_PD_79.pdf).

19 Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Former Diplomat Tex Harris’ Death*, Press Release Number: 040/20, February 24th 2020, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/fallecimiento-del-ex-diplomatico-tex-harris>.

20 Robert Cox, *Dwight Fulford: The Unknown Story*, Center for Latin American Openness and Development (CADAL), March 26th 2013, <https://www.cadal.org/publicaciones/articulos/?id=6048>.

de Mayo Association. This association was also assisted by the Women Dutch Association, that helped them buy their first office. The Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), founded in 1979 by Emilio Mignone, a lawyer and father of a victim of enforced disappearance, was assisted by the United States Department of State, the Ford Foundation<sup>21</sup> and the Peace and Justice Service (SERPAJ) of the French Catholic Committee. In 1980, the Director of SERPAJ, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and the funds were used to support the tasks carried out by the organization.

The award of a Nobel Peace Prize to Pérez Esquivel may be considered as an international democratic solidarity action, since he was not such a popular public figure, and the prize helped expose human rights abuses in Argentina and embarrass the military dictatorial government<sup>22</sup>.

With this background, a democratic Argentina has grounds to adopt a foreign policy active in human rights. Something that, however, has not happened yet. And traditional human rights organizations have only intervened to condemn situations which suit their ideological beliefs. For example, they never said a word about the human rights situation in Cuba, which, in addition to being a single-party system that criminalizes civil and political freedoms, was an accomplice of the Argentine military dictatorship<sup>23</sup>. Journalists Santiago O'Donnell and Mariano Melamed have pointed out in this regard that CELS, together with organizations from all around the world with which they have a network, have denounced that:

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21 Santiago O'Donnell and Mariano Melamed, *Human Rights: The History of CELS. From Mignone to Verbitsky. From Videla to Cristina*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2015.

22 Ceferino Reato, *Final Resolution: Videla's Confession about Victims of Disappearance*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2012.

23 Gabriel C. Salvia, C., *Closed Memory: The Cuban Revolution's Involvement in the Argentine Military Dictatorship*, Center for Latin American Openness and Development (CADAL), [https://www.cadal.org/informes/pdf/Memoria-Cerrada\\_24-3-2020.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/informes/pdf/Memoria-Cerrada_24-3-2020.pdf).

“... the CIA’s acts of torture in secret jails, have condemned the interruption of Efraín Ríos Montt’s trial in Guatemala, have sought clarification over the disappearance of forty-three high school students that were victims of criminal organizations composed of drug trafficking groups, the police and civil authorities of Ayotzinapa, Mexico, and they have even warned against the abuses of power by Zimbabwe’s dictator Robert Mugabe, who has ruled the country since 1980 and has been consistently condemned in international human rights forums for corruption and fierce repression. But not a single word was said about Cuba”<sup>24</sup>.

As for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, they have always supported and they continue to support the old Latin American dictatorial regime, which shows their political use of human rights<sup>25</sup>.

### **INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY FROM THE CIVIL SOCIETY**

If political realism means, in many cases, giving up speaking against human rights abuses in other countries over the government’s national interests, then the civil society’s idealism becomes critical. Unlike democratic governments, which come and go, the civil society organizations that manage to build a good reputation continue to exist and symbolize hope for those who live under conditions of slavery in different parts of the world.

However, the promotion of human rights and international democratic solidarity has a recent history in Latin America, like in Eastern Europe. Both regions, who experienced either military dictatorships or communist governments, agree that those who have been victims should help present victims, reinforcing Carter’s principle of non-indifference. That is to say, the

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24 Santiago O’Donnell and Mariano Melamed, *Human Rights: The History of the CELS...*, page 357.

25 Estela de Carlotto, *Meeting with an Honest Man*, *Página/12* newspaper, November 27th 2016: <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/5594-mis-encuentros-con-un-hombre-integro>.

fact that they live today in a democratic country and are free, and they have experienced dictatorial regimes in the past and received international solidarity during difficult years, reinforces their moral obligation to help others that are today in the same situation.

Unlike international organizations with longer histories, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, one based in the UK and the other in the US, both developed democracies, one might question the concern of countries like Argentina about the human rights situation in other nations; nations that are closer, like Venezuela and Cuba, and others that are further away, in Africa, Asia, the post-soviet Eurasia and the Middle East. In addition to exercising the right to freedom of assembly for a specific social purpose, in this case based on solidarity, defending human rights globally contributes to promoting and valuing those rights locally. For example, transparent and competitive elections, the freedom of the press, speech, assembly and peaceful demonstration, and the right to leave a country and return to it freely. It seems obvious in a democracy like ours, but they are rights and freedoms that are nonexistent in nearly one third of the countries in the world, three of which are Latin American: Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Also questioned is the fact that other countries, where human rights are violated but are not dictatorial regimes, are not condemned. That is the case of Mexico and Colombia, just to mention two cases of gross violation of human rights. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake not to admit that these countries hold elections and change governments, have freedom of the press, speech and protest, legally formed human rights organizations and access to international cooperation. Consequently, international democratic solidarity gives priority to politically closed societies and countries where the rule of law and democratic institutions are weak, issuing warnings about the danger of becoming dictatorships.

Kathryn Sikkink asks herself:

“If human rights international law, institutions and movements have been effective, why do so many people believe that human rights violations in the world are getting worse rather than better? Why do so many people believe that there are more violations and acts of torture and repression today? The answer is simple: we think the world is worse off because we care more and know more about human rights than ever before. The human rights movement was successful by drawing our attention to an increasingly wide range of human rights violations around the world. Inadvertently, as reports pile up and are read by the media, this may also convince people that human rights movements are making no progress in stopping these violations”<sup>26</sup>.

Nevertheless, regardless of its achievements, the impact, often invisible, of international democratic solidarity activism represents a message of moral support that may be summarized in Václav Havel’s words: “I know how important it is for a person to know that there are people out there who are not indifferent to their future”<sup>27</sup>.

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26 Kathryn Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope. Human Rights Legitimacy and Effectiveness Going Forward*, City of Mexico, Buenos Aires and Barcelona, Siglo XXI publishing company, 2018.

27 Václav Havel, *Letters to Cuba* (People in Need, 2005).





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## Parliamentary diplomacy on human rights

### INTRODUCTION

There is quite a lot of literature on “parliamentary diplomacy”, its evolution, scope and growth, but regarding its role in the defense and international promotion of democracy and human rights, much remains to be done, especially from Latin America.

For Stelios Stavridis, “parliamentary institutions are involved in international affairs in three main ways: by monitoring and influencing the foreign policies of national governments; by carrying out international activities and actions, known as parliamentary diplomacy; and by establishing and empowering parliaments as representative bodies of regional or global organizations, mainly through international parliamentary institutions (IPIs)”<sup>1</sup>.

Typical forms of Parliamentary Diplomacy are the support or rejection of governmental foreign policy; the activity and institutional role of Parliamentary bodies, such as the Foreign Affairs Committee; the activities of Speakers of the House; inter-parliamentary meetings; participation in Regional (Parlatino) and International (World Inter-Parliamentary Union)

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1 Stelios Stavridis, “Diplomacia parlamentaria: El papel de los Parlamentos en el mundo”, <http://www.revista-redi.es/es/articulos/la-diplomacia-parlamentaria-el-papel-de-los-parlamentos-en-el-mundo/>.

Parliamentary Organizations; parliamentary friendship groups; parliamentarians' networks; and electoral observation missions.<sup>2</sup>

With respect to the specific scope of Parliamentary Human Rights Diplomacy, the following can be included: plural representation; special commitment to democratic principles; control over the Executive Branch in foreign policy; globalization of democracy as a means of promoting world peace, placing the international community above the national interest of the State itself; and fundamentally, involvement in issues that the government and its diplomacy cannot address in formal relations with other countries, especially non-democratic ones.

A fundamental aspect of Parliamentary Diplomacy on Human Rights is to incorporate in political parties the defense and international promotion of democracy, by establishing a commitment, actions and contact networks that will later serve for its implementation from a legislative position.

### **PARLIAMENTARY ACTIVISM IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY**

Most democratic countries include human rights in their foreign policy, but in very few cases can this policy be characterized as “active” or is generally applied. In most cases it is merely a declarative or even demagogic expression.

Included in the chapter on “The International Dimension of Democracy,” Article 27 states: “A democracy should support democratic principles in international relations. In that respect, democracies must refrain from undemocratic conduct, express solidarity with democratic governments and non-State actors like non-governmental organisations which work for

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2 Gonzalo Salimena, *Pensar las relaciones internacionales desde la diplomacia parlamentaria*, <https://www.teseopress.com/contrapuntos/chapter/9-pensar-las-relaciones-internacionales-desde-la-diplomacia-parlamentaria> footnote-el-presente-capitulo-de-este-libro-constituye-algunas-ideas-expuestas-en-mi-tesis-doctoral-en-relaciones-internacio/.

democracy and human rights, and extend solidarity to those who are victims of human rights violations at the hands of undemocratic regimes”<sup>3</sup>.

The last part of the aforementioned article enshrines what is known as “international democratic solidarity”, that is, the claim for the victims of persecution, imprisonment and political harassment by dictatorships.

Dictatorships of different political colors have the common denominator of invoking respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, as well as not submitting to the supervision of the universal human rights system, avoiding being held accountable for their internal situation and refusing to receive the visits of UN special procedures that make them uncomfortable.

But rarely does the human rights foreign policy of a democratic country reach all dictatorships, since economic interests prevail, i.e. the priority given to exporting products and attracting foreign investment.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the reasons why parliamentary diplomacy is needed.

The Parliament is a power independent of the Executive and for this reason its members, elected by popular vote, have the political capacity to carry out activities that governments cannot, especially in developing democracies. Obviously, the foreign ministries and embassies of dictatorships will be able to transmit their complaints, but the diplomatic response of a democratic government will always be that these are initiatives of representatives of an independent power and that parliamentarians are accountable to their voters, party platform and their own personal trajectories.

In this regard, there is much that a parliamentarian can do to defend human rights internationally. For example, they can present bills condemning

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3 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Universal Declaration on Democracy*, 16 September 1997, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/48abd598d.html> [accessed 19 July 2023].

4 Alejandro Anaya Muñoz and Gabriel C. Salvia, *Los derechos humanos en las relaciones internacionales y la política exterior* (CADAL/KAS, 2021): <https://www.cadal.org/libros/pdf/Los-derechos-humanos-en-las-relaciones-internacionales-y-la-politica-exterior.pdf>

cases of human rights violations in dictatorial countries and request statements from the respective governments in intergovernmental bodies; denounce electoral processes that are not free, fair and transparent in autocratic regimes; and recognize the work and initiatives of democratic activists at risk.

Projects in Parliament may include the request for the release of political prisoners, the demand for free elections with international observation, the formulation of recommendations and observations to be made by their country during the Universal Periodic Review of a dictatorship in the UN Human Rights Council, and other requests to the Executive Power in votes on human rights in Intergovernmental Organizations.

Electoral observation missions in countries where the elections are suspected of lacking transparency are essential to subsequently decide on the recognition of the respective government. Even if there are no guarantees for political participation, as is currently the case in Nicaragua, Parliamentary Human Rights Diplomacy can request the activation of democratic clauses and warn that a government lacking electoral legitimacy will not be recognized.

Parliamentary Human Rights Diplomacy implies establishing a democratic clause for the creation of Parliamentary Friendship Groups (PFG), not admitting them with countries whose representatives do not emerge from free and competitive elections. It is contradictory for a parliament with plural representation to include a PFG with a country where a single-party regime rules, as in the cases of Cuba and China, representing an affront to those who risk their freedom and life in those authoritarian contexts.

Receiving publicly pro-democratic referents residing in or exiled from countries ruled by dictatorships is a gesture of moral support and recognition, which dictatorships deny them, and of international visibility. A praiseworthy example to cite is that of Federico Pinedo, who in 2018 being provisional president of the Senate of the Argentine Nation received in his office the Cuban democratic activist Rosa María Payá, daughter of the promoter of a referendum in Cuba, Oswaldo Payá, who died in a suspicious traffic



*Rosa María Payá, daughter of Oswaldo Payá next to Federico Pinedo in 2018 during her visit to the Argentine Republic.*



*Uruguayan Senator Rafael Michelini and Cuban activist Manuel Cuesta Morúa*

accident in Cuba. Pinedo received the head of Cuba Decide flanked by the flags of Argentina and Cuba. Another similar example was that of Uruguayan senator Rafael Michelini, son of Zelmar Michelini, an uruguayan journalist and politician assassinated in the city of Buenos Aires by the Argentine military dictatorship as part of the sinister Condor Plan. Michelini, parliamentarian of the then ruling Frente Amplio of Uruguay, received in his office his Cuban progressive colleague, Manuel Cuesta Morúa, Ion Ratiu Award 2016.

Parliamentary Diplomacy in Human Rights can also include the awarding of an international Prize to a reference person who stands out for his or her peaceful activism in an authoritarian context, following the example of the one named after Andrei Sakharov awarded by the European Parliament.<sup>5</sup>

The institutionalization of Parliamentary Human Rights Diplomacy, beyond the periodic renewal of the legislative body and political changes, would be strengthened by the competitive appointment of a Parliamentary

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5 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/es/the-prize/andrei-sakharov>

Commissioner for Human Rights and International Democratic Solidarity. The aforementioned actions by parliamentarians would be under the orbit of the person occupying this position, who should emerge from a very broad consensus so that his or her function does not end up being politicized and biased.

### **PARLIAMENTARIANS PROTECTING PARLIAMENTARIANS AND ACTIVISTS: THE CASE OF THE BUNDESTAG**

As in many cases, comparative experience can serve as a guide for adopting good practices, as in this case parliamentary diplomacy committed to human rights and international democratic solidarity. One example is the “Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians” program, an action of the German Bundestag in favor of parliamentarians and human rights defenders persecuted abroad.

The rationale of this initiative perfectly summarizes the idea of “Parliamentary Human Rights Diplomacy” and is worth transcribing in full:<sup>6</sup>

*Human rights defenders and threatened parliamentarians need protection worldwide.*

*No one advocating the implementation and observance of human rights in Germany runs any risk in doing so. There is no threat of punishment, nor is there any danger involved. In many other countries, however, people who defend human rights can themselves become the victims of human rights abuses.*

*Lawyers, journalists, trade unionists, and representatives of women’s organisations, ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous peoples are under particular threat as defenders of human rights.*

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6 [https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/875662/e23ed707a581eccc80e42630a-c83bdeb/PsP\\_Flyer-englisch-data.pdf](https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/875662/e23ed707a581eccc80e42630a-c83bdeb/PsP_Flyer-englisch-data.pdf)

*In many countries, politicians are also among the human rights defenders who are at risk. They may be elected representatives, opposition politicians or mayors, and they are frequently active in very difficult political conditions. Exercising their right to freedom of expression is usually their sole offence. The criticism they voice often makes them a thorn in the side of state institutions in countries where the human rights situation is problematic, and of paramilitary groups. They are frequently slandered, threatened, removed from office, subjected to arbitrary arrest, sentenced for “subversive” activities, tortured or even murdered. Some people seen as undesirables “disappear” forever. Those responsible are seldom convicted.*

*This is why the members of the German Bundestag’s Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid launched the “Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians” campaign. The basic idea is that the Members of the German Bundestag, who can carry out their work in safety, should help fellow parliamentarians who are at risk in other countries and persecuted human rights defenders.*

*With its adoption of a cross-party motion on the protection of threatened human rights defenders in December 2003, the German Bundestag has undertaken to participate in the initiative established by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to protect parliamentarians worldwide. In this way, the Bundestag is fulfilling the voluntary commitment it has made in the IPU framework to contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights. The campaign represents a milestone in solidarity between German and foreign parliamentarians and human rights defenders, and a significant contribution to a credible human rights policy.*

*What can Members of the Bundestag do for their fellow parliamentarians abroad?*

*Members of the Bundestag have a network of international contacts which they can use on behalf of fellow parliamentarians who are at risk. The “Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians” campaign is not conducted*

*solely by the members of the Committee on Human Rights, who are in any case already actively involved on behalf of many victims of human rights abuses. On the contrary, all Members of the Bundestag –irrespective of their areas of expertise– are called on to participate.*

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**CURRENT BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY OF THE  
“PARLIAMENTARIANS PROTECT PARLIAMENTARIANS” PROGRAM**

COUNTRY	CLASSIFICATION IN THE DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020	SCORE
Afghanistan	Authoritarian Regime	2.85
Saudi Arabia	Authoritarian Regime	2.08
Algeria	Authoritarian Regime	3.77
Armenia	Flawed Democracy	5.35
Azerbaijan	Authoritarian Regime	2.68
Bahrain	Authoritarian Regime	2.49
Belarus	Authoritarian Regime	2.59
Bosnia	Hybrid Regime	4.84
Brazil	Flawed Democracy	6.92
Cambodia	Authoritarian Regime	3.10
Cameroon	Authoritarian Regime	2.77
Colombia	Flawed Democracy	7.04
Democratic Republic of Congo	Authoritarian Regime	1.13
Cuba	Authoritarian Regime	2.84
Chad	Authoritarian Regime	1.55
Chile	Full Democracy	8.28
China	Authoritarian Regime	2.27
Egypt	Authoritarian Regime	2.93



**CURRENT BENEFICIARIES BY COUNTRY OF THE  
“PARLIAMENTARIANS PROTECT PARLIAMENTARIANS” PROGRAM / 2**

COUNTRY	CLASSIFICATION IN THE DEMOCRACY INDEX 2020	SCORE
China	Authoritarian Regime	2.27
Egypt	Authoritarian Regime	2.93
Ethiopia	Authoritarian Regime	3.38
Philippines	Flawed Democracy	6.56
Guatemala	Hybrid Regime	4.97
Honduras	Hybrid Regime	5.36
Hong Kong	Hybrid Regime	5.57
India	Flawed Democracy	6.61
Iran	Authoritarian Regime	2.20
Israel	Flawed Democracy	7.28
Kazakhstan	Authoritarian Regime	3.14
Laos	Authoritarian Regime	1.77
Malasia	Flawed Democracy	7.19
Mexico	Flawed Democracy	6.07
Moldova	Hybrid Regime	5.78
Myanmar	Authoritarian Regime	3.04
Nicaragua	Authoritarian Regime	3.60
Pakistan	Hybrid Regime	4.31
Russia	Authoritarian Regime	3.31
Syria	Authoritarian Regime	1.43
Sri Lanka	Flawed Democracy	6.14
Tanzania	Hybrid Regime	5.10
Türkiye	Hybrid Regime	4.48
Ukraine	Hybrid Regime	5.81
Uganda	Hybrid Regime	4.94
Uzbekistan	Authoritarian Regime	2.12
Venezuela	Authoritarian Regime	2.76
Viet Nam	Authoritarian Regime	2.94
Zimbabwe	Authoritarian Regime	3.16

**Source:** Own compilation based on information provided by the Secretariat of the Commission for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid of the Bundestag and The Economist’s report “Democracy Index 2020”.

*The Members use this information to decide how they can best help threatened colleagues without potentially exposing the person in question to additional danger. The motion on the protection of threatened human rights defenders proposes various options for action:*

*Drawing attention, both in Germany and abroad, to threatened and detained human rights defenders in talks with political decision-makers and in letters of petition, urging that they be protected or released;*

*Paying tribute to the commitment of human rights defenders when abroad –where possible– by meeting them in person for a discussion, visiting them in prison, pressing for them to be given a fair trial, or observing court proceedings;*

*The information provided by the Committee Secretariat can also be used for forms of support within Germany. It offers a good basis for petitions and talks with political decision-makers from countries in which human rights are violated.*

*To ensure that the information and lists of names are kept up to date, it is important for Members who have held talks or travelled abroad to pass on their impressions to the Secretariat of the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, notify it of the steps they have taken, and make recommendations as to what course of action should be taken in future.*

*Getting involved is worthwhile – because the campaign aims to protect the courage and perseverance of human rights defenders worldwide.*

*The literature on parliamentary diplomacy refers to its informality in dealing with relations with other countries, especially non-democratic ones. The program of the Bundestag includes the formality of this activity, worthy of imitation in other democratic parliaments, although not free of political bias, as can be seen in the scope of the same to a Latin American country considered by *The Economist* as a “full democracy”.<sup>7</sup>*

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7 <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>

## CONCLUSION

Parliamentary diplomacy on human rights faces as its main challenge the fact that voters mainly demand from their representatives to address domestic issues, much more so in flawed democracies, such as most of Latin America. In other words, why should a parliamentarian be concerned with the situation in various dictatorships around the world when there are human rights problems and an important public policy agenda for improvement in their own country?

One answer is the adoption of international democratic solidarity as part of foreign policy and, therefore, of parliamentary human rights diplomacy. Putting oneself in the shoes of those who cannot participate in the political life of their country and who are denied not only the possibility of joining a political party and competing for public office, but also the right to express their opinions, assemble, associate, demonstrate, be informed and move freely.

Now, in countries that lived through dictatorships and then received important signs of international democratic solidarity, including from foreign parliamentarians,<sup>8</sup> Memory plays a fundamental role in the moral obligation to provide support to current victims of non-democratic regimes.

Concern about serious human rights situations in other countries can also contribute to strengthening fundamental freedoms in one's own country, i.e., valuing the democracy in which one lives and which allows for changing governments through free elections, resorting to justice, demonstrating peacefully, accessing public information and informing oneself through a variety of alternative media, for example.

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8 See Lucio Garzón Maceda "La primera derrota de la dictadura en el campo internacional", in: Hugo Quiroga and César Tcach (Eds.) "Argentina 1976-2006 Entre la sombra de la dictadura y el futuro de la democracia", Homo Sapiens Ediciones, 2006; Roberto Álvarez "A 40 años de la visita de la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos a la Argentina (CIDH)", [https://www.cadal.org/publicaciones/archivo/Documento\\_PD\\_79.pdf](https://www.cadal.org/publicaciones/archivo/Documento_PD_79.pdf)

However, parliamentary diplomacy on human rights has other limitations. One is the worrying case in some countries, such as Argentina, where pro-government parliamentarians subordinate themselves to the foreign policy of the government, being controlled in their international activity and thus seriously affecting their independence. This generally happens when parliamentarians did not obtain their positions after participating in an internal competition and therefore “owe obedience” to those who decided on their candidacy. The other limitation is what is known as “term of office”, the fact that parliamentarians hold office for a certain period of time, so that whoever assumes a commitment of this type may do so for the duration of their mandate.

Consequently, a first step in implementing effective parliamentary diplomacy on human rights begins with the political parties, in which those who will later become members of Parliament are formed and become involved. In this sense, the international relations areas of political parties should include the defense and promotion of human rights in their work agenda, incorporating general criteria and not double standards. That is to say, not to fall into the contradiction of being critical of the dictatorships of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, and at the same time strengthen ties with the Chinese Communist Party.

Political parties must also cooperate with civil society and independent human rights leaders in order to broaden their view of their international insertion and not to limit themselves to their internal discipline, which is uncomfortable in the face of committed and innovative opinions.

All indices that globally measure the state of civil and political liberties show the decline of democracy in the world in recent years. For this reason, parliamentarians from democratic countries can do much not only for their own country, but also for other countries where international support is essential for those who defend human rights under very difficult political conditions to find reasons for hope.

## About the author

**GABRIEL C. SALVIA** | BUENOS AIRES, 1964. General Director of CADAL. International human rights activist. Since 1992 he has served as director of Civil Society Organizations and is a founding member of CADAL. As a journalist he worked in graphics, radio and TV. Compiled several books, among them *Diplomacy and Human Rights in Cuba* (2011), *Human rights in international relations and foreign policy* (2021) and *75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Views from Cuba* (2023), and he is the author of *Dancing for a mirage: notes on politics, economics and diplomacy in the governments of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner* (2017). He is also the author of several articles and reports, including *The chairs of the Council: authoritarianism and democracies in the evolution of the integration of the UN Human Rights body*.

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# About Cadal

CADAL (*Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina*) is a private, non-profit and non-partisan foundation, established on February 26, 2003, in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Our mission is to promote human rights and international democratic solidarity, particularly in authoritarian contexts where freedom of association, expression, assembly, and the right to political participation are repressed, and in democracies that threaten their institutions, civil and political liberties, and erode the rule of law.

As part of its task of promoting human rights, CADAL is a part of a series of coalitions, forums, and organizations that share the same values: the World Movement for Democracy (WMfD), the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (ICNK), the International Tibet Network, the Coalition for Freedom of Association, the Network of Think Tanks KAS in Latin America, is a member of TrustLaw (the global pro bono program of the Thomson Reuters Foundation) and is registered as an Organization of Civil Society before the Organization of American States (OAS).

CADAL's mission is inspired by the Memory of solidarity received by human rights activists, politically persecuted, relatives of detainees and disappeared, and independent journalists during the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983).

In October 2022, the DECyT Research Project “The impact of International Human Rights Law on Foreign Policy” of the Faculty of Law of the University of Buenos Aires recognized the work of CADAL given its historical, coherent and courageous defense of Human Rights in the area of foreign policy.



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# Memory, human rights and international democratic solidarity

“...Dedicated to all victims, not only those who were jailed or executed but also those whose lives were ruined by totalitarian despotism.”

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## SECOND PART

- ▶ Closed Memory: the complicity of the Cuban revolution with the Argentine military dictatorship
- ▶ The limits of the human rights foreign policy and the importance of international democratic solidarity
- ▶ Parliamentary diplomacy on human rights

