

Speech given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the ceremony to celebrate the completion of the repair, expansion and building of 779 primary and secondary schools in the capital. Guanabo, Habana del Este, August 30, 2002

Dear construction workers;
Dear teachers and students:
Fellow residents of Havana and Cuba:

Today, as in the glorious days of the Bay of Pigs when our brave soldiers took less than 72 hours to wipe out the mercenary troops who had invaded our country to destroy the Revolution, our construction workers, supported by the people living in the capital, have achieved a great victory.

A program was planned and implemented over a 20-month period; it was to cover 779 primary and junior high schools in our capital city, where a profound and unprecedented type of educational revolution that will serve as an example to the world was initiated. Of this figure, which includes all the schools at those educational levels, 734 were to be completely renovated and expanded, 12 were to be rebuilt, and 33 would be newly built. The number of classrooms needed for the program amounted to 3,287, including the rooms needed for computer labs.

On April 27, 2001, the first 100 renovated schools were inaugurated; by October 26, 2001, 202 had been renovated; on April 10, 2002, renovation number 302 was inaugurated; and on June 29 renovation number 402 was inaugurated. On that day, there were still 377 schools needing to be renovated, rebuilt or built.

The program had to be completed by September 1, 2002. We had only 62 days available in which to finish the program of the 779 on time and with all the requisite quality. The 779 included 33 new schools, some of which had not even been started.

Why such an urgent effort? It was not just a whim or a desire to break records. It was simply that, as is traditional, classes would begin in the first few days of September. An enormous effort to train thousands of urgently needed teachers in intensive courses had been made and the aims of their training had been fully met. All the classrooms already had their televisions and all the schools had their computer labs. The 1,200 urgently needed teachers who had been trained in intensive courses to teach computer skills were ready. Actually, the fact of having 20 months for the renovating and building thousands of classrooms and other buildings seemed to be a perfectly adequate amount of time to complete our task without any great pressure.

As it happens as often as not, some of the cadres responsible for the job were overconfident. The actual fact is that, as the school year was about to begin, it could be seen that the program was behind schedule; calculations of the time and effort necessary were overoptimistic. Moreover, although it was possible to work day and night during the summer, because that was school vacation time, the excessive heat and the rains could present not insignificant obstacles.

We became aware of the need for a titanic effort as renovation job number 402 was inaugurated ^¾excellent work on an important and beautiful school in La Lisa^¾ with work still to be done on 377 schools and only nine weeks to do it. All the materials were available. We had to complete the program on schedule, do it under the strictest quality control, and without using work forces from projects given priority because of their economic importance or the value of the services they were called on to provide.

The extraordinary organizational capacity of our Party and Young Communist League, of the people of the Havana and of its grass-roots organizations was put to the test. We had the enthusiastic support of ministries and many agencies and companies which, from the outset, had

shown great enthusiasm in supporting a plan which would benefit all of the city's children. The constituencies, People's Councils, and People's Power Assemblies in each municipality devoted all the time and support needed to the program. The contribution of teaching staff, school principals and municipal education directors was particularly outstanding. The children's involvement was very moving; they inspired joy, passion and courage in everyone, doing the tasks within their capabilities any time of day and sometimes in the early hours of the morning. Parents and their children were also there at night or in the early hours of the morning.

On more than one occasion the number of construction workers, both professionals and volunteers, who worked in one day totaled almost 40,000 people. Several provinces sent reinforcement construction workers, people chosen for their good morale and abilities. No one ever lost his or her confidence or certainty that we would succeed.

At 9:00 p.m. today we begin this ceremony, only three hours away from the deadline to complete the building program. Earlier today, at around midday and at 2:15 p.m., work on the last two schools was completed. A sport's reporter would say that the Olympic race between the time available and the building program for the 779 schools was won by the latter in a photo finish.

Hundreds of thousands of people took part in one way or another in this shared project. Many working days stretched to 16 and 20 hours. Those involved in our endeavors in July and August were as well looked after as our resources allowed. Counting breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks, 30 million meals were supplied.

The total costs of the two-year school building program reached 25,851,000 in U.S. dollars and 215,827,000 Cuban pesos. The value of the buildings, restored, expanded or newly built can be calculated at no less than two billion dollars. Their social and human value cannot be calculated. The 20 students per classroom at the primary level puts our country way ahead of all other countries in the world at this educational level.

And while this was going on in the capital, other titanic efforts by construction workers and the people were continuing in the battle to totally repair the damage and destruction caused by Hurricane Michelle and to meet the deadline and do so with quality. The cost of this was much higher but equally essential.

In what happens in any large undertaking, there were contradictions, deficiencies, arguments, strong criticisms, reprimands and discussions. There is no doubt that this contributed to some rectifications, reorganization, strategies and tactics developed along the way, ingenious solutions to various unforeseen problems and situations where our engineers, architects, building technicians and chief project designers showed their talent.

Much will be written and thousands of anecdotes will be told about this noble and selfless epic which will bestow such great benefits on our homeland. The experience gained will be of great use in other plans and projects. The Revolution's ambitious educational program will continue to expand throughout the whole country.

As I bring my words to a close today, it only remains for me to say that the battle was won with great dignity and courage. We can feel proud of the feats we have accomplished.

However, a basic principle must be laid down. Today, everything is very beautiful in the educational institutions, which look like new. As is normal in any construction works, problems will doubtless arise in some of those recently built, rebuilt or renovated. There will have to be a labor force ready to find urgent solutions to those that arise at whatever point. And the most important thing: the relevant mechanisms must be organized in the Capital, at the municipal and people's council level, in order to immediately carry out repairs in any school that needs it. Appropriate, accurate, certain and completely rational and economical calculations must be made, with care to put aside and protect the materials needed, so that the 779 schools in the building program just completed are always kept in the top-notch, heartening and beautiful state they are in as we declare them open today.

A veritable culture of protecting and preserving the schools, their resources and equipment must be encouraged in the children, the teachers, parents, local residents and our people in

general. Nothing more noble, human, motivating and useful than a school can be created.

We must ensure that what fills us all with joy today will never become, through laziness or irresponsibility, a source of sorrow and frustration.

Let us safeguard what has been achieved. Let us be worthy of the feats we have shown we can accomplish!

Long live the revolution!

Long live socialism!

Patria o muerte!

Venceremos!

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