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Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, Tribute to Fidel Castro

Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs,
Her Excellency, Ambassador Ana Silvia Rodriguez Abascal, Chargee d'Affaires of the Republic of
Cuba to the UN,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the evening of 25 November 2016, Fidel Castro, the former President of Cuba, passed away in Havana at 90 years of age. Today, the membership of the United Nations comes together to pay tribute to one of the Twentieth Century's most iconic and influential leaders.

For nearly five decades, the late President Castro led the Cuban revolution and, for many, he embodied the struggle of the global South for independence, justice, and development.

As Prime Minister and then President of his country, Fidel Castro propelled Cuba onto the global stage by staunchly advocating against what he saw as the inequities of the prevailing world order. His activism in pursuit of a fairer and more just world made him a symbol of resistance and inspiration to people across the world, in Latin America, Africa and beyond.

A skilled orator, President Castro was capable of capturing the attention of crowds for hours on end with this rhetoric of sovereignty and aspiration, perhaps best illustrated by his record-breaking speech delivered in the UN General Assembly in 1960.

For most Cubans, Fidel was not just a global figure of revolution, he was and will always remain the man who brought them both dignity and levels of progress in social development that remain the envy of many around the world.

With free public education and healthcare guaranteed under the Cuban Constitution, Fidel Castro's greatest achievement was arguably to bring Cuba's illiteracy and infant mortality rates to among the lowest in the world. Even today, Cuba's public healthcare system has been recognized by the World Health Organization as a model for others, proving that even with scarce resources it is possible to provide care for the most vulnerable.

Bearing in mind the major restrictions on the development of the Cuban economy and the lives of its people, Cuba's accomplishments throughout this period become even more impressive. They

demonstrate the unbreakable Cuban spirit that Fidel Castro himself came to symbolize perhaps better than any other.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the modifications to the Cuban embargo and the implementation of domestic reforms, Cuba is currently experiencing a period of renewal and readjustment and I know that I speak for all Member States when I wish the Cuban government and its people the very best in this endeavor.

In doing so, I would also like to turn the focus back onto us, the members of the United Nations.

An internationalist to the core, in his last intervention at the United Nations, on the occasion of the Millennium Summit, President Castro laid out the challenges that humanity would seek to address 15 years later with the Sustainable Development Goals.

“Anyone can comprehend”, he stated, “that the fundamental objective of the United Nations in the century which is upon is that of saving the world, not only from warfare, but from underdevelopment, hunger, disease, poverty and the destruction of the natural resources indispensable for human existence”.

As we honour the life and mourn the passing of this uniquely influential figure, we take solace in the fact that his core ideals – solidarity, development, peace, justice, and mutual respect – will continue to endure.

Our hearts and thoughts are with the family of Mr. Castro as well as the Cuban Government and people.

May he rest in peace.

I now request those present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of the late Fidel Castro.