

[Address by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz at the ceremony held in celebration of the 53rd anniversary of the attacks on the Moncada and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes barracks AT THE "HOMELAND SQUARE" OF Bayamo, Granma, July 26, 2006 \[1\]](#)

Date:

26/07/2006

Dear fellow Cubans from Granma and across Cuba:

Between 28 and 30 March 2002, 4 important programs of the Revolution were undertaken in this heroic province, whose successes command admiration and even astonishment (Shouts from the audience).

There's no need for me to overdo it, because the things I'm referring to here are difficult to believe.

First offered to a mere 18 pupils in a primary school in Pílon --better to say, a little school in Pílon--, equipped with a single computer powered by solar energy, the Introductory Computer Sciences Course, four years after its inception, benefits 74 374 primary school students who now have access to 2 021 computers.

The province's primary and secondary education audiovisual programs already have 7 460 television sets, 3 581 VCRs and 5 054 computers at their disposal. Four hundred and eighty five schools that had no electricity are now powered by photovoltaic cells --the so-called solar panels. Those schools do not need to invest a single cent in fuel in order to have the electricity they require to operate these equipment or even to have light; 167 of these schools have an enrollment of less than 5 pupils, and 24 have only one pupil and a teacher. These schools embody the principle that no child ought to be deprived of schooling, no matter how remote their place of residence.

The Comprehensive Upgrading Course for Young People (SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE) was inaugurated --that was four years ago here, in Granma, in the city of Manzanillo, on that evening-- with an enrollment of 12 124 students. Today, some 17 930 students are enrolled. A total of 17 950 young people who have completed these courses have begun university studies. Including these, Granma can report the figure of 47 409 students enrolled in higher education, three times the number for the entire country at the time the Revolution triumphed. Enrollment in the 39 university degree programs offered has increased considerably thanks to a program aimed at making higher education accessible to everyone, which has opened 54 new chapters across all of the province's municipalities (APPLAUSE).

At the time, Granma's unemployment rate was 10.7 %; today, it has dropped to 1.6 % (APPLAUSE). I remember that sometime before that date, we spoke about a 17 % unemployment rate in Granma, or at least in Manzanillo. That figure was really dramatic. Many factories were shut down during the special period.

During those days, a Video Viewing Rooms Program was also set in motion to take television programs to rural populations living in isolated regions. Back then, the province had 171 such rooms. There were

many, and we felt proud about them. Today, there are 454 rooms, the country's highest number. If we add up all visits paid to these rooms so far, figures will show that they have been visited by the rural population more than 4 million times (APPLAUSE).

These facilities, in addition to offering entertainment, have become centers where people learn and play chess –which is good to develop the brain muscles—(LAUGHTER), take courses on sanitary issues and participate in other important social activities. Three hundred and sixty four of these rooms have been especially equipped and staffed to offer rehabilitation services to the community (Applause). I remember the day when we first came across that idea. If they were already in place, if their construction was solid, if they had electricity, all we needed to do was to find a place to install there the equipment that was needed by so many people who were unable to come down from the mountains, or move from a far-off place to Media Luna or Niquero or Pilón to go to a polyclinic where they could receive the adequate treatment for any kind of injury or find a solution to any of their needs, which are many more that anyone can imagine. Ten new Video Viewing Rooms are currently being set up.

The Visual Arts Teaching Program was opened at the “Carlos Enríquez” Academy, in a refurbished and expanded building in Manzanillo. Bayamo's “Oswaldo Guayasamín” Academy, a newly inaugurated institution, has joined the program. Both institutions have graduated 83 students, and their current combined enrollment amounts to 171 students (Applause).

At the time, the refurbishing of the Manzanillo Theatre, which had been shut down for thirty years, was still underway. The repair process has been completed and over 120 000 theatre-goers have enjoyed 580 shows which have been staged there.

Programs for the creation of concert bands gained momentum and a school for training in the specialty, one of a kind in Cuba, was created. This made it possible for all of the province's municipalities to have their own band (Applause). Ten bands were assembled in the 13 territories which did not have any; 2 children's bands were created, and another 2 were created in prisons.

In keeping with these ideas, prison inmates were also offered access to upgrading courses. Of these, 243 have reached 12th grade of education and 140 have completed courses offered by the Youth Computer Clubs (Applause), instead of resorting to violence and drugs, with which no one could be re-educated, or, better to say, educated, because, as a rule, those persons end up in prison because they never received proper education. Let us all educate, and we will see how the numbers of those who go to prison will be reduced (SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE FIDEL!”).

There are already 43 Youth Computer Clubs in the province equipped with a total of 524 computers. To date, 59 473 students have completed courses in these (APPLAUSE). Seven new Clubs will be built as part of this program (SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE!”).

Over this period of time, 614 works as part of the Battle of Ideas and four other major constructions of great social significance have been completed in Granma.

The latter are:

The Manzanillo Aqueduct: Three hundred and fifty kilometers of water mains and more than 500 kilometers of connecting pipes have been installed. This structure benefits more than 105 780 inhabitants, and the whole work is not finished yet. This should make us meditate about what water is, how much it costs, and how unjustified and irresponsible it is to waste water.

Bayamo's South Ring Road System: A system of 6.7 kilometers road that facilitates access to the city's downtown area and help better preserve the city's historical and urban heritage. And you have seen nothing yet. How much is still to be done in Bayamo! But this does not mean that we will regret it. We would not think it is weird if one day the citizens of Bayamo would rather set the city on fire than to give it up to the enemy (SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE FIDEL!”). We'd rather set it on fire and be left with nothing,

because a whole world could be constructed on the basis of dignity.

We have been blockaded, threatened for more than fifty years, and we can say to our petty neighbors to the North: "Show me single photo, a single map of a country or of a province where there's something comparable to this which you, citizens from Granma, have accomplished in four years" (SHOUTS OF "FIDEL! FIDEL!")

The city of Bayamo's North Drainage facility: It is currently in its first stage of construction, and will provide 33 794 inhabitants with water and urban development services. It will also allow for the management of wastes that will benefit 80 000 people

The 14.3-kilometer-long segment of the Veguitas - Yara - Manzanillo road, once in critical condition, was repaired and re-opened. The repair of the Dátil - Universidad segment is currently underway.

More than 14 229 students have benefited from the reconstruction of 27 schools.

Construction work in 8 polyclinics which offer services to 241 596 inhabitants has been completed and work in 21 others which offer top quality services to the rest of the province's population continues. Thirteen of these will be completed within the next 4 months; the 8 remaining polyclinics will be ready within 10 months, maximum (Applause).

The province has also received numerous pieces of high-tech medical equipment which have contributed to improve the quality of medical services.

Like the other 165 which have been completed elsewhere in the country, the 8 polyclinics built in Granma offer new ultrasound, thrombolysis, traumatology, endoscopy --without which it is impossible to identify many of the problems affecting the digestive tract, although this technique is used also for other purposes. It is a whole new field-- and allergy laboratory services. How many persons suffering from asthma, just to mention an example, live in any of our provinces? Our country is an island, characterized by high humidity levels and a heavy incidence of asthma; so it happens in Japan, in England, and elsewhere. Those services we are referring to were only offered at hospitals until 2002. Besides, services such as X-ray, menstrual regulation, minor surgery, ECG, optometry, ophthalmology and dentistry, which before were available in a limited number of polyclinics, are also offered. Like clinical laboratories, today these services use state-of-the-art technology. They offer 24 hour services. Why should they be closed, if pain, or infarction, or any other ailment could appear unexpectedly? Are going to establish the same kind of trade union standard that may be applicable to a car factory or a steel yard? We must not forget that hospital and polyclinics deal with human beings; they are visited by men and women, children, pregnant women, people from all ages, who are prone to suffer from any health condition or accident.

I can assure you that during the times of the Indian Hatuey, nobody died from a car accident (LAUGHTER). And there are still some people who die because they get killed, like that truck driver who not long ago, close to the town of Guamá, was driving a truck down the South Highway without a license, and who knows in what condition. The truck overturned and several men, women, and children got killed. We saw that, we received the news. It hurts to think that this man was one of those --and I say one of those, not to say one of so many--irresponsible persons!

All of you are listening --when you can--to what is going on in Cartagenas, and more than once you must have heard the news about Eddy Martin, who suffered a serious accident cause by a bus which ignored the STOP signal. Was there any need for that to happen? And, why? Maybe, as long as our country improves its education, acquires more knowledge and becomes more aware of this problem, we will be able to apply more rigorous rules. Maybe a more educated people will manage to minimize those cases.

I am just telling you about some of these things. Even if the day remains as cloudy as it's been, the whole time of this ceremony would not be enough for me to explain all that can be done to combat crime, and more than that, to prevent the proliferation of delinquents in our country, and what are the cultural, educational, and even genetic phenomena associated with crime, despite the need for discipline by every people, every nation, and the society as a whole.

The day when there are truly just societies in the world –and that day is getting closer, because there is no other choice--, that day, we could make a very rational use of all the strength derived from education to create values and, specially, to convey values. That is the task of teachers, educators, professors, from primary education until they are one hundred and odds years-old. Because I believe that there are, who knows how many, thousands of citizens in this country, and that is understandable, and there will be more and more who could even go beyond the age of one hundred years. But our petty neighbor to the North should not be afraid; I was not thinking about being performing my duties at that age (SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE). Because, after all, I do not perform such duties right now because of my own will; I never struggled for that. Yes, I will struggle my whole life, until the very last second of my existence, as long as I am in full control of my own senses, to do something good, something useful, because we, revolutionaries, have all learned to be better every new year of our lives (SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE FIDEL!”), and human beings are ennobled when they do something for others (SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE JULY 26!”)

Today, the polyclinics offer services and make use of technologies which four years ago only hospitals had.

That is why several intensive care units were put up in those municipalities where there were no hospitals. At this moment there are 118 municipalities which have them, and we will continue to study the whole situation because wherever there is a polyclinic, even when there is also a hospital, it could be convenient to expand those services. We might be speaking about a bigger municipality.

In Havana, one municipality may have 100 000, 150 000 inhabitants. Having a single polyclinic in every municipality, which was the original idea, may not be enough; there could be three or even five.

How many are there in the municipality of “Diez de Octubre”? That municipality has more than 200 000 inhabitants. So is the case for other cities. The city of Camagüey has around 400 000 inhabitants. This means that all of these ideas will be further perfected, and all of these services will also become more rational. Because I believe that we must do things even better, and when we think we have reached perfection in any given area, we must go to another, where there are many imperfections. There are still many and there will always be, because there will always be new needs.

In the past, no one needed a telephone, no one needed electricity. When the citizens of Bayamo set the city on fire, the only thing they had was the telegraph, and I believe it was through the telegraph that Carlos Manuel de Céspedes knew that an arrest warrant had been issued against himself. Electricity did not exist, there were only candle lights. I think even carbide was used as a source of light. Well, back then everybody went to bed earlier, there were no world championships, no Olympics or any of the like which could keep the people awake up until midnight. Well then, how happy would I be if I could go to bed at that time (LAUGHTER AND SHOUTS OF “LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION! LONG LIVE FIDEL!”).

Ten surgery wards, 7 clinical laboratories, 5 intensive care units and sterilization equipment for general, pediatric and maternal hospitals have been reopened previous to this date. Sixteen opticians', which cover all of the province's municipalities, have been fitted with new equipment.

Of the 28 600 Cuban health professionals working in 71 different countries as part of internationalist missions, 2 232 are from Granma (Applause). Because our country today has, by far, the highest number of doctors per every inhabitant in the whole world. Unfortunately, it is so sad to know that Sub-Saharan Africa, with almost 700 million inhabitants, has only 50 000 doctors, while Cuba, with 11.2 million inhabitants has more than 70 000, and in our universities there are more than 20 000 students

of medicine, not to speak about the tens of thousands of students from the Third World, most of them from Latin America, who are studying in Cuba. The doctors of the Third World, a significant number of the doctors of the Third World, are being trained in Cuba!

The province's art school, which increases considerably the number of students enrolled in art education, was concluded: in 2000, there were only two art schools in the province, with a total of 202 students enrolled in the elementary level; today, there are 501 students from several eastern and central provinces enrolled in the elementary and middle levels of art education as well as in 16 music courses. In the next academic year, middle level dance courses will begin to be offered.

The school for art instructors, with a capacity for 651 students, has been refurbished. So far, 385 art instructors have graduated, and today they teach in 210 schools and offer artistic appreciation workshops to more than 52 000 children. Four years ago none of that existed here. But then the Battle of Ideas began, and the first art instructors graduated on that day when I elegantly fell down in Villa Clara (LAUGHTER). It will be two years since I fell. Tell me about it; I've had to go through a lot of rehabilitation. I wonder what would have happened to me without a rehabilitator who could make me walk and use my arm, which doesn't punch as hard as it used to. But I still have my left arm, which is a very symbolic arm (LAUGHTER AND SHOUTS OF "LONG LIVE FIDEL!").

The "Camilo Cienfuegos" Military Schools of Bayamo and Manzanillo were built. Each of them has an enrollment of 300 students.

In the last four years, 3 151 young people have graduated as social workers in the province (Shouts from the audience). They have actively participated in important revolutionary projects in Granma and across the country.

Granma has no need of any Yankee transition plan to teach people how to read and write, vaccinate or care for the health of its population. (People in the audience shout: "No!"), because today we have what the US people do not have, what tens of millions of Americans, more than 40 million, do not have. Let's see what they will do with all of these spectacular advances. And I have not referred to any data as yet. Bear with me and you will see (SHOUTS OF "LONG LIVE!").

We will have to ask Mr. Bush and others who are speaking about a transition plan, to come to Granma so that they could understand what an education program, a health program, an art and culture development program is all about (SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE). They could go elsewhere in the country. We invite them to visit us (SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE).

Three years following the date when those indicators were reported, in July 2005, a devastating category 4 hurricane lashed the province of Granma. Measurement equipment collapsed when the winds reached the speed of 238 kilometers per hour. It was estimated that winds could have reached the speed of 300 kilometers per hour. Like razors, the winds sheared entire forest areas in the Sierra Maestra's southern range. Just tell me about it; I saw the pictures of the Command Headquarters of La Plata. Nothing remained standing there. I saw the forests razed; those were pristine forests. I do not know what kind of phenomenon was that. Perhaps the winds concentrated through the canyons of the rivers that came down the mountains, surrounded by mountains. Something weird must have happened there. I could not imagine that nature could be so terribly harmed by a hurricane. I think that area over there is being rebuilt now, and that is why I speak about a sheared area, because it looked like razed, like a sugar cane field that had recently been cut. And all of that was going on while you were involved in this program more than one year ago. That hurricane ferociously lashed the province of Granma, and that obliged us to turn our attention away from the main construction projects then underway and to concentrate on the repair or re-construction of 46 300 homes which had been affected, 14 196 of which had been completely destroyed, according to estimates. More than 90 % of residences in the municipalities of Pilón and Niquero and 75.5 % of homes in Media Luna were affected and immeasurable damage was caused to health, educational and commercial facilities; 389 educational centers, 119 family doctor's offices, 17 pharmacies, 250 grocery stores, 630 kilometers of

road, 5 bridges, 101 television viewing rooms, 3 tourist facilities, hundreds of crop plantations and several industrial facilities. All of that happened while this program was being implemented, the success of which made this province to earn recognition from the whole nation.

No sooner had the hurricane passed over the province that the first aid materials arrived. That same day, 12 power generators, dispatched to the province by Cuba's government to address the severe power failures there, began to arrive.

In the course of these months, the province has received 215 331 zinc tiles,

102 175 cement boards, 1 461 tons of steel and 14 661 tons of cement. It has also received 25 233 mattresses and 3 800 television sets to be delivered to the victims of the hurricane.

These materials have made it possible to repair 18 225 roofs which had been totally or partially destroyed, as well as 1 307 houses that had been completely destroyed. I can assure you that this has been one of the greatest efforts ever been made by the country; maybe we could have had more polyclinics refurbished by now. Several thousands homes still need to be re-constructed or repaired.

The province is also involved in a number of strategic programs traced by the Revolution.

As part of the energy-saving revolution, efforts have been devoted to install 7.9 megawatt emergency power generators, 5.2 megawatt rural sub-station groups, and batteries made up by 8 groups each in Bayamo, which produce 30 megawatts of electricity. Granma's total capacity at the moment is 43.1 megawatts. Today, the province's total energy demand oscillates between 86 and 89 megawatts of electricity. The civil works required by the electrical installation in Manzanillo, designed to house 16 power generators, has been completed. Once in operation, this installation shall increase the generation capacity by 30 megawatts.

Also as part of the energy-saving revolution, 262 435 multi-purpose electric pressure cookers and an equal number of hot plates, rice cookers and water heaters have been distributed to the same number of households. Ninety seven per cent of homes with electricity use this type of energy to cook, in a province where 93.5 % of households used to cook with kerosene.

The province has the equipment needed to supply the 100 per cent of the households scheduled to receive these appliances during the first stage of this process, that is to say, those homes that have the required electrical infrastructure.

A program aimed at replacing decade-old, inefficient refrigerators whose years of use had made them energy-guzzlers was recently undertaken in Granma. To date, nearly 14 000, a bit more than 10% of refrigerators, have been replaced with new units. The process of distribution of new fridges should be completed within the following eight months. Perhaps we will finish sooner, but it is better to have some time margin. However, you may rest assured that Granma will not be forgotten (APPALUSE). We started by Pinar del Río, which is the pilot province which has paid very good services to the country.

Hundreds of thousands of incandescent bulbs have been replaced with energy-saving ones –and this

process has not concluded.

A total of 114 957 makeshift fans (which consumed high volumes of electricity) were replaced with efficient fans in the province.

A total of 3 800 television sets have also been distributed to the population. Priority was given to those families whose homes suffered damages as a result of hurricane Dennis.

Six food storage silos have been constructed and 18 others are currently being built, for a total capacity of nearly 50 000 tons. We had none of them before. Those are state-of-the-art refrigerated silos which are very economic and will be equipped with their respective hammer mills.

Manzanillo's Municipal Television Station went on the air on September 8, 2004. Two years after those inauguration ceremonies took place, we sent one of them to Granma on an experimental program. It is now in Manzanillo. The results were really fabulous; it was proved that people wanted to listen to local news. There are poets, writers, farmers, producers, many people of merits. But usually the national news shows do not inform what is going on in any given municipality.

All municipalities in the country, or almost all of them, depending on their geographical position, will have their own municipal television station (APPLAUSE). Imagine how useful these could be for education, in addition to entertainment and information programs; and how much could this contribute to combat certain problems. Yes, we already have tens of those equipment. We are making an analysis of each and every municipality where these equipment will be installed. The one in Manzanillo started to operate on September 8, 2004.

Surveys have confirmed the impact it has had on the local population, 80 % of which prefers its shows, as they have community content. It broadcasts 6 daily hours of programming, Monday to Friday -and of course, it is logical that certain broadcasting times should be respected; so is the case for the national information programs and others for different purposes. A similar Television Station is being set up in Niquero: it should be operational by mid August.

The Provincial Television Station is under construction in the area surrounding the Plaza de la Patria, which will also house the municipal Television Station of Bayamo, currently under construction. 'Televisión Serrana', another television station in Granma, reaches the more than 90 300 inhabitants of the mountain regions.

To take television signals to the most out-of-the-way places in the province, 227 satellite television receivers have been installed in schools, television viewing rooms, social clubs and clinics, in areas where no signals can be received, and 137 have been installed in homes in Cabo Cruz, an area that was

severely damaged by hurricane Dennis.

The “Rubén Bravo” Computer Sciences Polytechnic School has an enrollment of 1303 students. Seventy eight per cent of the construction work has been completed and the school is scheduled to be concluded by September this year.

Currently, 553 students from Granma are enrolled in the University of Information Sciences (UCI) (Applause). That is one of the best institutions that have ever existed; 553 students from this province attend that university and have everything they need there: the best teaching aids, the best professors. It already has 8 000 students, and the figure will increase to 10 000 by the next school year. Besides, mini-UCIs will be opened in every province, so in addition to this university, we will perhaps have some tens of chapters in other provinces of the country.

Those students worked for the Miracle Mission and have accomplished several other tasks; they are talents who have been displayed. No one can imagine how much this country will receive in return from those institutions, which also become a very important source of revenues for a country like Cuba. And most certainly it will be so in the future.

Next school year, a regional chapter of this university will be opened in this province on an experimental basis to welcome 300 students from Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba, Holguín, Las Tunas and Granma. This school will be working temporarily in Manzanillo's Computer Sciences Polytechnic. In the 2007-2008 school year, the school will be relocated to the “Luis Milanés” general technical school in Bayamo.

The opening of this regional chapter of the University of Information Sciences and of two others in Ciego de Avila and Artemisa next academic year, will open the doors of higher education to 1 050 young people who will graduate from computer sciences polytechnic institutes from across the country.

But the Revolution's colossal social projects are not limited to the province of Granma, so dearly loved by all of us who landed and fought for nearly two years in the mountains of this province, the winner of this year's national emulation award, a real tribute to those who died on July 26, 1953 at the Moncada or in Bayamo, because Santiago and Bayamo were the two cities targeted to start that Revolution (SHOUTS FROM THE AUDIENCE).

The first victorious battle was fought in this province, the last offensive of the dictatorship was defeated here, its military apparatus nearly collapsed in the Santo Domingo-Las Mercedes-Arroyones triangle, alongside the course of the Yara river (Applause).

A few kilometers from the city of Bayamo, 180 men laid siege to the town of Guisa and fought for 10 days against the enemy's best operations troops, striking and crushing reinforcements, which were

headed by middle-sized and heavy tanks that, backed by aviation, tried in vain to prevent us from taking Guisa (Shouts from the audience).

The entire country is responding with growing enthusiasm to these programs. Through their efforts for the 26th of July emulation competition —comparable to those to which the extraordinary success of Granma and its Party is owed—under the direction of their brilliant, outstanding and respected leader Lázaro Expósito (Applause and shouts of "LONG LIVE!" and "Long live the Party" and other slogans), the provinces of Camagüey, Villa Clara and Havana City (Applause) earned for themselves the mention of Outstanding Provinces. Pinar del Rio received an acknowledgement for its contribution to the energy-saving revolution and other merits (Applause).

The progress we've made in the whole country is attested to by unequivocal data:

In the first half of 2006, 51 633 children, 11 per every one thousand inhabitants, were born in Cuba; 99.9 % percent of these births took place in health institutions. In 1970, this percentage had not yet been reached, only 91.5 % of births occurred at medical facilities. In the last 20 years, between 1986 and 2006, 99.9 % of all births occurred in health institutions, where specialized services are guaranteed.

Until 23 July of this year, Cuba's infant mortality rate was of 5.56 per every one thousand live births (APPLAUSE). That same day last year, it was 6.4 per every one thousand live births. The 0.80 % difference means 86 more children who have been saved.

On April 27, 1952, the infant mortality rate published by Bohemia magazine was 118 per every one thousand live births.

Today's infant mortality rate of 5.6 per every one thousand live births means that, for every one thousand children who are born alive, 994 reach the first year of life.

In 1970, of every one thousand children born alive, 956 reached the age of five. In the last five years, 992 per every one thousand children born alive reached the age of five.

To date, seven provinces —Matanzas, Villa Clara, Cienfuegos, Havana City, Camagüey, Holguín and Granma —continue to report infant mortality rates of five or less per every one thousand live births. The lowest rates of 4.08 and 4.0 are reported by Holguín and Granma, respectively.

The infant mortality rate reported by Havana City is 4.5 per every one thousand live births.

We could ask Little Bush (LAUGHTER) what is the infant mortality rate in the capital of the United States. I don't know but we could even ask him what is the infant mortality rate in New York, a very famous city.

That City of Havana which needs a transition period, and of course, a health program, has an infant mortality rate of 4.5 per one thousand live births.

It is convenient to remember that, because they tell lies and more lies, and each time we prove them wrong they shut up, but that really is not enough. We will hammer them with the truth.

It was with the truth that we made this Revolution; it was with the truth that we gained victory; it is with the truth that the Revolution has defended itself during almost 50 years (APPLAUSE AND SHOUTS OF "LONG LIVE THE REVOLUTION! LONG LIVE FIDEL!").

In 1970, the infant mortality rate associated to congenital malformations was 3.8 per every one thousand live births. There had been 11 years since the Revolution had triumphed. Of course, back then there were not many doctors; remember that there were 6 000 and they took away 3 000. There was only one medical university and only one teaching hospital. In 2003, that rate was 1.9 per every one thousand live births, half as much it was before. In 2004, 1.7; in 2005, 1.5; and up until July 2006, it has been 1.3 per every one thousand live births (Applause). The United States, Spain, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Denmark, Finland and Holland all have higher rates. Granma reports the lowest infant mortality rate associated to congenital malformations in the country: 0.4 per every one thousand live births.

Of those children born with congenital malformations this year, 44 were saved by cardiovascular surgical interventions and 35 by neonatal surgical interventions.

Life expectancy at birth

In the years 1950 to 1955, life expectancy at birth in Cuba was estimated at 59.6 years. At the time, the world's developed countries were reporting a life expectancy of 66.1 years, that is to say, 6.5 more years than those estimated for newborns in Cuba. Half a century later, Cuba has a life expectancy at birth of 77.0 years (APPLAUSE), 1.2 more years than that estimated for developed countries during the period 2000-2005, which was 75.8 years.

We are not the country with the highest life expectancy rate as yet, but today our country's rate is above the average rate of developed countries. There is no doubt we need "a transition"; this is just too

much, this can not be tolerated (APPLAUSE). It is an extremely cruel violation of human rights. The fact that today the life expectancy rate in our little and blockaded island is 1.2 years above the average rate of developed countries is an unforgivable crime.

In 1970, life expectancy in Cuba was estimated at 70.04 years; today, thirty years later, as I've already said, we've reached 77.0 years, an increase of 6.96 years over this period. During the same period, developed countries report an increase of only 4.40 years, for a yearly average of 0.15 years, while Cuba's was of 0.22. And none of these countries endured a blockade or went through a special period.

Currently, Cuba is among the 25 countries that report the highest life expectancy rates at birth in the world. These countries account for only 14% of the world's population, according to 2005 estimates.

Active screening for disabilities in Cuba

You will now listen to some serious issues. And you may wonder, aren't these things which are being said not serious? No, these are far more serious, these are issues related to health.

In Cordoba, I spoke about active screening. What do we mean by "active screening"? That is the truly reliable diagnosis of the state of health of a population and the greatest leap forward we can conceive of to increase the life expectancy of people today.

Cuba has been the only country in the world to take this gigantic step forward when it set out to determine the total number of people with disabilities. This was done, and it was done here in Granma too, especially in the mountains, down the Cauto river and in all those places, to find out which were the causes of mental retardation, and know whether or not this was due to some problem with the soil, the drinking habit, inbreeding, or any other cause.

A total of 366 864 physically disabled persons were identified:

Mentally retarded: 140 489, which accounts for 38.2 %.

You know that there are more than 50 000 children in special schools, that mental retardation is no dishonor to anyone, and in a society like ours, mentally retarded children should go to school and get prepared so that their lives could be as normal as possible. No one is to blame. Parents perhaps are if, for example, they fail to fully understand that during pregnancy, mothers-to-be should not drink alcohol. Parents could have some responsibility, but children have none. There is mild, moderate, severe, and deep mental retardation. Children suffering from the latter are much less.

92 506, or 25.2 %, have a physical and motor disability.

46 455, or 12.6 %, are visually impaired.

23 620, or 6.4 %, have a hearing disability.

36 869, or 10.05 %, have a mental disability.

1 831, or 0.50 %, suffer from chronic kidney failure.

25 094, or 6.8 %, suffer from more than one disability.

This study has allowed us to undertake a health program for people with disabilities which has no parallel anywhere in the world.

Active screening for ophthalmologic afflictions in Pinar del Rio
until July 14, 2006.

No information has been released about this, because this is a work in progress. I talked about this at the MERCOSUR Conference, and I also did at the University of Córdoba.

All of the population aged 5 and over in Pinar del Rio was examined using a door to door method –there are still some who have not been visited as yet.

Universe of population to be examined: 685 961

Population examined: 593 406

Per cent of the population examined: 86.5 –and still we have to include here more than 13 %.

Diagnosed with cataracts: 42 753 patients, which accounts for 6.24 % of the entire population.

This is an active screening, it is not a statistics of patients who went to see the doctor, which has been the usual practice so far: to go and see a doctor, if there is a doctor available, if there is a polyclinic, if there is a hospital.

Diagnosed with glaucoma –a serious disease--: 19 609 patients, which accounts for 2.86 % of the entire population.

Diagnosed with pterygium: 43 875 patients, which accounts for 6.40 % of the entire population.

Diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy: 1 038 patients, which accounts for 0.16% of the entire population.

Diagnosed with refractive defects, myopia, astigmatism, and other sight conditions: 152 371 patients. It means that 22.22 % of the entire population suffers from this problem.

What happened? What we had first done with the disabled was done again to identify sight problems, and these were the results. Now we have expanded this program to screen for other disorders. You will see:

Active screening for chronic kidney failure

You know that this condition is troublesome. If it is not treated on time, it may require the use of an artificial kidney until a transplant is possible.

In the municipality of Cerro, in Havana City, in an area where the active screening method was applied, 13 098 patients of 26 629 people at risk of developing kidney failure were visited at home. Urine tests were conducted on all patients using a Cuban specific reagent to detect early damage to blood vessels.

In the municipality, only 168 cases of chronic kidney failure were known.

Of the 13 098 patients at risk, 1 608 tested positive for kidney damage (12.2% of those tested).

Of these, 98 were under the age of 4; 30 between the ages of 5 and 14; 30 between the ages of 15 and 24; 532 between the ages of 25 and 59; and 918 were 60 years and older.

A total of 1 440 people in an area of the Cerro municipality did not know they suffered from kidney failure.

Of the 1 608 people diagnosed with a kidney condition, 1 268 patients (78.8%) are in the initial stages of the condition, and can take measures to prevent the development of kidney failure and its serious consequences.

In the Isle of Youth, where the screening was also conducted, 77 398 people, or 96.6 % of the population, were tested. A total of 14 322 people, 18.5 % of the population, tested positive for kidney damage. Of these, 13 460 people can take measures to prevent the development of kidney failure. If this condition is not detected at an early stage, the chances of suffering kidney damage are high.

To illustrate what an active screening can mean for a given population:

In the province of Pinar del Rio, from May 2, 2006, 15 days following the beginning of the active screening, to July 22, 2006, 6 650 who had not been previously diagnosed, have regained their sight or experienced an improvement of their sight (APPLAUSE). All have been operated on for cataracts. Look, only for cataracts, a problem that can be solved, as well as all others, but this is far more simple. All who have been diagnosed with cataracts shall receive medical attention and the needed treatment.

I have spoken to you only about cataracts (APPLAUSE), which affects a sense as important as the sight, because many persons did not realize they were losing their sight. The disease was discovered in its initial stages. Our country has today the human capital and the equipment needed to do solve this problem.

Active screening has become the word of order. These figures are unbelievable. There's nowhere you can find them, simply because they were never recorded anywhere.

Pinar del Río has this percentage of people suffering from cataracts and it accounts for approximately 14% of the country's population. Now we have to take these ophthalmologic studies to other provinces, to find out what is going on in Granma, Holguín, and elsewhere in the country. Why could we do that active screening in Pinar del Río? Because there is a building where 1000 ophthalmologists are studying, in addition to the several hundreds that we have today in our country, with the equipment and the

means they need. We sent 200 of them to Pinar del Río to carry out the active screening, and in quite a few places, surgeries have started to be performed.

Now, just imagine how many patients will have undiagnosed heart conditions, how many will have an incipient cancerous formation, at a stage when it can be successfully treated. Thus, based on all of that which I explained here and also there, at the MERCOSUR Conference as well as at the University of Córdoba, it is essential that we address the problem and work very hard to solve it.

What will happen to the rest of the countries if they do not do this, if there is no one who could do this, if medical care is mostly in the hands of private practitioners, at a time when neo-liberalism has been doing away with social security, including social security hospitals and public hospitals, to privatize medicine?

Do any of you believe, compatriots, that this problem can be solved by privatizing medicine? (SHOUTS OF "NO!").

Each of those surgeries costs...some charge 1000 dollars, others 1 500, others 2000. A cataract surgery in the United States can cost 5 000 or 6 000 dollars, it depends. The world can not afford that, and I can assure you that our country is acquiring the necessary capacity to operate on millions of patients, and the necessary equipment to do that is already in the country. There are 30 centers which have been performing these surgeries even before we knew about these realities, which could almost be described as tragic. There is a new concept. It is not enough to have polyclinics, doctors, family doctors, and to have it all, if citizens are not aware of their problem because they do not feel the symptoms. You may have as much as you want, but the active screening as a new concept is inescapable, and is being supported by a country that has engaged in an enormous social change, expressed through these data. The concept about medical services should be radically changed, just in the same way I'm explaining.

This is too important. How many persons would be dying every year out of lack of a timely diagnosis? How much could we increase the life expectancy rate if we take care of children, and do what we are doing for them? Of course we can not lower the infant mortality rate below zero; obviously, it is too difficult to take it down to zero, but there is no doubt that that we will take it down below those levels I was referring to when speaking about all of these provinces. I am speaking about those children whose more than 100 deaths per every 1 000 live births before the Revolution have now been reduced to 5. We have gone a long way, which means a 95 % improvement. And if you intend to go from 5 down to 0, and you lower that rate to 3, that means that you have improved by 2%. We will be speaking again about all of these diseases later, but the problem is already on the table and at the international level. Let's see if they keep on with the "transitions" nonsense, at a time when the world needs to be revolutionized because that will be the only way in which it could be saved. And I have only referred to health and environmental pollution, and the enormous amount of stupid things done by this species, as a result of the economic and social system, which has already become anachronistic. Capitalism, and its more developed stage which is imperialism, are the ones which waste by the cartloads, and the ones which have designed this world order filled with hunger and hardships.

Fortunately we can understand and speak about these topics, and you listen with great interest, as the one we see here, because this is not the same people that existed back in 1959; this is not the people who lived under capitalism, that was unable to understand any of this. People died without learning to read and write. There was no television, no one who could inform the people, as today it is the case in many countries of the world, where peoples only watch and listen to advertisements.

As you know, our television, our radio, our newspapers, have no advertisements. They can launch a campaign about something, but not an advertisement. What a big difference! We now see that those media, those mechanisms to the service of the people, can render extraordinary benefits to all citizens, to the country, to households, to children.

There are countries in Africa today where the life expectancy rate is 38 or 39 years.

Great efforts are being devoted to remodel, equip and adapt health facilities across the country's municipalities following new conceptions.

One hundred and seventy three polyclinics have been refurbished. Works on 33 of them were completed in the first half of this year. Efforts are underway to complete the construction works of 60 other polyclinics during the year 2006. The abovementioned studies would benefit greatly if the pace of this program is stepped up. I am sure that all compatriots anywhere, based on these realities that we have been analyzing here, will make greater efforts, because we have the equipment, we have the staff, we have all that is needed to advance quickly in this direction.

Four hundred and fifty three wards offer rehabilitation services to all of the country's municipalities. Forty four new wards will become operational, which will make a total of 497. Two million five hundred and fifty seven thousand patients have already benefited from these services.

You may rest assured that the world's most modern equipment has been purchased to equip our physiotherapy and rehabilitation centers and that our technical personnel is undergoing intensive training in the use of these technologies and to obtain the advanced knowledge needed to offer these valuable services (Applause).

By the way, let me tell you that the medical brigade of the "Henry Reeve" Contingent which went to Pakistan included 400 physiotherapist and rehabilitators from all provinces –and there were some who were sent by this province, because we asked for them in every province—and we have thousands, and they are receiving more and more equipment. These are state-of-the-art equipment. I could mention, as an example, the equipment for the hydraulic massage of the upper limbs of the body, and the equipment for the hydraulic massage of the lower limbs of the human body.

We have already bought 600 such sets of equipment for Cuba and another 600 for Venezuela –there are some over there, and there are already some here too-- (APPLAUSE); exceptional electromagnetic equipment, which produces all kinds of vibrations. Those are around 14 pieces of equipment in each set.

For some months now –nothing has been said about this—we have been working to create a hospital for athletes, although it will offer its services to other persons too. Pitchers usually suffer from lesions on muscular fibers which prevent them from performing properly. So is the case for many other athletes.

There is one more thing. Those highly proficient athletes can not retire just like that. No one has studied yet the effects of spending an X number of hours doing exercises which are as tough as a long distance race, weight-lifting, or many other exercises.

Sports are very attractive. See how soccer mobilized the whole world. But, who has taken care of the health problems of athletes? Well, our country will, and a whole hospital will be devoted to research in this field. We are already taking the first steps in that direction, and many others have been taken in other areas: nutrition must be one of them, and another must be the amount of calories, as well as proteins, the effects of cholesterol, fatty acids, and food. All of that will be studied in detail and afterwards we will convey to others the results (APPLAUSE).

Municipal intensive care units

A total number of 67 859 patients have been treated. A total of 57.9 % of these (39 309 patients) experienced a full recovery without being referred to other health institutions.

A bit less than one third of patients had to be referred to other health institutions outside of their municipality (22 198 patients, 32.7 % of the total).

The number of lives saved amounts to 18 737 patients at the new intensive care units (APPLAUSE) including those who were at risk of dying when they received medical attention at the municipal intensive care units –and how long has it been since these intensive care units have been established? Because this is not only about intensive therapy, this also includes the emergency cardiology services, the ECG, the defibrillator at the polyclinic which is nearby the house of citizens who live in the cities; in the countryside these could be farther. You know what it means to receive immediate medical assistance...In Cuba, heart problems are the first cause of death, and most of patients die on the way to the hospital, they die because they did not receive immediate assistance within half an hour or one hour. They take one and a half hours, two hours, and by applying all relevant medications the blood clots can be removed. A high number of persons can be saved if they are assisted by an experienced professional and receive those medications, using equipment which help them to find out what is wrong with the patient. The diagnosis is not based only on the doctor's judgment.

The survival rate for patients suffering from bronchial asthma with moderate or severe bronchospasms is of 99.6 %. Sometimes a pneumonia or an asthma can create an irreversible condition if the equipment is not there (APPLAUSE).

The general survival rate for patients suffering from more than one trauma or severe lesions has been of 97.1 %. It went up to 98.1 % in the first half of 2006.

The survival rate for patients with a cerebrovascular condition is of 95.5 %.

Of the 3 185 patients treated for acute myocardial infarctions, 1 439 (45.2%) benefited from thrombolysis services offered at municipal intensive care units.

The survival rate for patients who suffered acute myocardial infarctions is of 92.0%.

A total of 166 municipal ambulance stations have been constructed –and they all have those equipment-- and a total of 402 ambulances have been distributed for use in case of emergencies.

Though there's much more to speak about, I don't want to carry on for too much longer. Just listen to what I wrote. The sun is rising, minute by minute, and the heat can become quite unbearable. Today, on July 26, the day when we commemorate the battles which took place in Santiago and Bayamo, at 7:00 PM, in the city of Holguín, we will inaugurate the largest system of synchronized power generators in the country, generators which will produce more than 200,000 kilowatts of electricity, the equivalent, in power, to a Felton thermoelectric plant, a system which was set up in only 5 months. I will then have the opportunity to take up other topics.

Before concluding, allow me to repeat what I said on March 30, 2002, at the Buey Arriba Open Forum, when we promised you the things which are today encouraging realities in Granma.

"It was with great satisfaction that we witnessed the beginning of these four programs in Granma, a province so full of history, so full of merits.

"We cannot forget that in this province, in La Demajagua, our first war of independence began in 1868.

Address by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz

Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastroruz.name>)

"We cannot forget that this is the place where the slaves were first emancipated, thanks to the revolutionary gesture of that great patriot, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, who had the opportunity to study and thus conceive and lead a revolution. His awareness led him inexorably to that essential act of justice. He marched towards Bayamo, his troops took the city, and, in Bayamo, glorious pages, the most glorious pages of our nation's history were written. There, that anthem that fills us with pride and moves us every time we hear it was first sung. There, Máximo Gómez led the first 'machete' charge against the colonial forces that, coming from Santiago de Cuba, were leaving Baire and heading for Bayamo. There, Cubans discovered their greatest weapon: the 'machete', that 'machete' with which they worked in the field, later to be wielded by the cavalry; the machete and horse were the fundamental weapons used by Cubans, with which they began to write the glorious history of our homeland. There, in Dos Rios, was spilt the blood of José Martí, the Apostle of Independence, a genius of the ideas, and of the noblest ideas that can ever be conceived; the National Hero of our homeland, whose ideas inspired the Generation of the Centennial and today inspire and will continue to inspire more and more all of our people ".

Long live the Revolution! (Shouts of "Long live the Revolution!")

Homeland or death!

We shall overcome!

(Ovation)

Stenography Department - Council of State

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