

21st Century Slavery

By Hilda Molina

“Everybody has the right to leave any country, his own included, as well as to return to his country”.

DOCUMENTOS

As a sort of contemporary slaves, we, the Cuban people in the middle of the 21st century, do not only depend on government permissions to leave or to return to our country, but we are also constantly confronted with the violation of our right to free movement, as the permissions are granted arbitrarily, they are delayed or refused, causing a deep grief within thousands of innocent families, who, paralyzed by their fear, are unable to claim for the respect of their basic rights. And to this crime another one is added: the obligation to pay the travel authorizations, at a high price of the convertible currency. Despite these enormous obstacles it is estimated that approximately three million countrymen have been involved in an uncontrollable and untenable exodus during five decades. Some people travel legally; others run away, escape; flee from their beloved island, creating a ripping within the families that affects the very bowels of this nation. However, the most tragic one of these occurrences that are already dramatic by themselves is that over decades the government viciously prevented any kind of relationship between the absentees and their family members that still remain in Cuba. Furthermore, the government has criminalized the honest possession of foreign currency, sent by the loved ones residing in other latitudes, with long years of prison. Really surprising, incomprehensible, outrageous is the fact that personalities and organizations that were honored and recognized for their defense of democracy and the respect for human rights, who are entitled to watch over these rights, use their privileged political and social positions to act as guarantors of this fifty years old form of contemporary slavery.

Hilda Molina was born in Camagüey, on May 2nd, 1943. She holds a Doctorate in Medicine, with the first expedient in her Course at Universidad de La Habana. She is specialized in Neurosurgery, with Excellent expedient at Instituto Nacional de Neurología y Neurocirugía. More over she specializes in neurological recovery. Researcher at Academia de Ciencias de Cuba. She accomplished a Medical Mission as neurosurgeon in Algeria (1980-83). At Instituto Nacional de Neurología y Neurocirugía se was Chief of the Service of Vascular Neurosurgery and Under Director Profesor. She introduced into Cuba, with the advances achieved by international scientific community and her links with it, the new field of neurological recovery. She was founder of Escuela Cubana y Latinoamericana de Restauración Neurológica. By her initiative, the Centro Internacional de Restauración Neurológica (CIREN) is created, being designed, established, founded and manager by her, achieving great national and international prestige. She is author of several scientific works, published by national and international specialized publications. She participated as speaker in scientific events, work visits and academic exchange as a professor for conferences and seminars in universities and institutions in United States, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Sweden, England, among other European and Latin American countries. She was named Honored Citizen of Kansas City, United States. She received the most significant decorations given to scientists and women in Cuba. Because of her scientific merits she was elected member of the Cuban Parliament in 1993. In 1994, after a long process of discussion with the ruling authorities, she resigned by her own decision to everything that linked her to the Cuban regime, including to her condition of representative. She resigned because the government wanted to turn the Medical Center she created into an institution only for foreigners who paid in dollars, with the subsequent discrimination towards Cuban patients. Also, in protest, she returned all the decorations she had received.

The 13th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that marks the beginning of this text is little controversial and generally respected. The inhabitants of any region of the globe travel freely for different reasons such as work, study, or recreation, counting only with their passport and the necessary money to pay the trip. Nobody controls them, nobody persecutes them, and the governments do not confiscate their properties. That was what I noticed when I fulfilled in Africa what over here is called an "Internationalist Medical Mission". Within the remote Algerian province of Mostaganem, the young nurses of a modest hospital saved their money over months to enjoy their holidays in France, without giving any account to any authority. However, as for every rule there are exceptions, this right has been publicly and with impunity violated within my fatherland for the last fifty years.

Our history in this context is sad and at the same time outrageous. As a sort of contemporary slaves, we, the Cuban people in the middle of the 21st century, do not only depend on government permissions to leave or to return to our country, but we are also constantly confronted with the violation of our right to free movement, as the permissions are granted arbitrarily, they are delayed or refused, causing a deep grief within thousands of innocent families, who, paralyzed by their fear, are unable to claim for the respect of their basic rights. And to this crime another one is added: the obligation to pay the travel authorizations, at a high price of convertible currency. Despite these enormous obstacles it is estimated that approximately three million countrymen have been involved in an uncontrollable and untenable exodus during five decades. Some people travel legally; others run away, escape; flee from their beloved island, creating a ripping within the families that affects the very bowels of this nation. However, the most tragic of these occurrences that are already dramatic by themselves is that over decades the government viciously prevented any kind of relationship between the absentees and their family members that still remain in Cuba. Furthermore the government has criminalized the honest possession of foreign currency, sent by the loved ones residing in other latitudes, with long years of prison.

As the mere intention to abandon this island was considered treason, the ones who were interested in obtaining travel permissions had to walk a sinister path. This torment took some five-year-periods. Hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens have been humiliated, slandered and even imprisoned for their determination, accomplished or not, to live abroad. Before receiving the desired permission, the applicants had to undergo the despicable and degrading assemblies of repudiation and they were obligated to realize fieldwork. If the Heads of

State finally decided to liberate them, arranging their exile, they confiscated their personal belongings, prohibiting any link with them; and accused them of "traitors", "stateless persons", "worms", "mercenaries" and other derogatory sobriquets that are typical of the most vulgar language. Obviously, to the ones who stayed in Cuba they imposed a total isolation from these despised people, without paying any attention to the ties of blood and love that link us with them. I remember the constant vigilance that the heads of the "Comité de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR)" of the area maintained over my inoffensive mother, knowing that she received letters that were obviously family-related, sent from the United States by their less inoffensive brothers and nephews. To defeat this vigilance and the absurd invasion of personal privacy, my mother suggested to our family members to send letters to their native city Ciego de Ávila and from there the letters were afterwards carried out by some acquaintance who was heading to the capital city.

Nonetheless, this mad situation was modified when this very government, immersed within an enormous economical disaster, was in the urgent need of dollars. So the government legalized the persecuted foreign currency, authorized the until then repressed contacts to separated family-members; and allowed through permissions and under strict control, journeys of the compatriots living abroad to Cuba. This economic-political change, which had as indisputable objective only the collection of dollars, received the hypocrite name of "meeting of the fatherland with its community abroad". Certainly we, the inhabitants of this island, can already contact our family-members and friends that live beyond the seas and we do not have to hide the economic aid they send us. However, in the middle of the 21st century, this beautiful and noble nation still is home to a vast slave endowment, where to the more than eleven million members the right to free movement is denied; and where we are obliged to scrounge the essential travel permission as well as to pay taxes in foreign currency for our liberation. It is not a secret that it is precisely the most self-sacrificing, hard-working and talented slaves that are confronted by major difficulties when trying to achieve the humiliating and costly authorization. Why do the Cuban people escape from their home country since half a century, breaking the tradition of love to their roots and to the land that gave them birth? The answer is simple. God creates us free. The human rights are innate to rational beings, "they are not benevolent concessions of any nation". When powerful individuals, who fancy themselves gods, take the authority on themselves to grant or deny these rights, "of these concessions can be derived their manipulation, their non-recognition, their denial and their coercion; all dimensions of violation of these very concessions". That

is what the Cuban government does by claiming the omnipotent authority to grant or not deny travel permissions.

This government which is obligated to defend the innate rights of its citizens violates them in the name of the law and with the aid of instruments it should use to defend them. As a logical consequence of such daunting abuse, the thinking men and women, born freely and with the intention to live in freedom, resist the perpetual oppression; they are tired of being machines. Thanks to these innate conditions, in a certain moment they decide to break the chains and free themselves off this suffocating system that within the course of the last fifteen years has fiercely regulated the existence of four generations of Cubans, instructing us how, what, where and when we are allowed to think, feel, talk, read, study, eat, suffer, be happy, cure our diseases until even die. Fifty years of broken rights, inoculated terror, degraded dignity, submission, debasement, repressed diverging opinions, official gagging, have generated an ill society, whose members, once the moment arrives, watch out for freedom.

However, the search of freedom that today is led by the Cubans covers some very particular characteristics, because in the middle of the 21st century they run away as the so-called “mustang” slaves, in the disgraceful age of the Spanish slavery colonialism. As if it were the case of previous century’s slaves, my terrified compatriots in their majority, far from confronting the bosses of the nation, requiring the respect of their rights, pretend admiration, love, devotion and fidelity towards the political process that oppresses them. But at the first chance and in the most original ways, they flee from the jail island, using the same huge strength that lies inactive in every captive, in every slave.

It is in the very year of 1959, when the massive exodus of the population is initiated. And not only the opponents of the political process took part in the escape, but also many of the ones who had fought within the guerillas and the urban underground movement, others for religious reasons, and also some people without any political interest, who refused to be communists. As I have previously shown, very soon, also in this year 1959, appeared the derogatory names by which the government officially standardized all those that had left, trying to discredit them: “traitors”, “unpatriotic”, “worms”, “mercenaries”, etc. However, the very revealing sobriquet of “deserter” has been the favorite one to fundamentally designate the ones that escape within the course of an official journey, or who flee unexpectedly from the country, abandoning important tasks. And I say it is a revealing sobriquet because by adopting it, those who unlawfully occupy the power, explicitly admit that we are not free citizens of a normal nation, but rather an army

commanded in a totalitarian manner. Nevertheless, these compatriots the regime qualifies as “deserters” are actually contemporary replicas of the “mustang slaves” of the past years, of those who desperately escaped to the mountainside, trying to free themselves from the infernal colonialists.

No slave driver accepts to lose one of his slaves; not the ones of the past and not the ones of the present. That is why in this unfair society the terrifying “ranchers” emerged, terrible individuals supported by dogs, who took charge of the relentless persecution of the unfortunate “mustangs”, until making them return to torture, or to murder them. Today’s mustang slaves are also persecuted without cease by the current ranchers of the state, and by their foreign associates. As the Cubans, who achieved liberty, and also their family members, who are kidnapped here, we all live in a constant fright, because we know that this government, nourished by hatred, guards us and persecutes us, employing their long and powerful tentacles and their metastasis scattered in every corner of the world. It’s difficult but not impossible that the ranchers of this age achieve to capture those who could free themselves. However, they cannot capture them and move them back to this kingdom of darkness, nor can they execute them physically; hence they try to execute them morally, denigrating them, defaming them, discrediting them and making a fool of them in front of the national and international public opinion.

Indeed, in this year of 2009, in the tenth year of the 21st century, my home country is a gigantic slave endowment with its corresponding mustangs and ranchers; some of them escaping in pursue of freedom, others persecuting the fugitives to hinder their escape. And this extemporaneous disgrace is not at all surprising in itself. History reveals that periodically, century after century and in different latitudes, “illuminated”, “elected” personalities have appeared those who exceed divine powers, that self-confer upon themselves the capacity to control even the souls of their fellows. Neither does the applause that is given to this variant of slavery by the governments that impinge upon our rights surprise us; nor the evident complicity of brotherhood of the ones who are loyal to the power, those who already ascended the throne or are waiting to ascend it, who dream of implementing a similar system within their respective countries. It is not even surprising that mankind, overwhelmed by immense problems; and the press, greedy for striking news, echo the words of the Cuban hierarchy and call common people “deserters”, whose only and simple wish is to abandon the ground they were born, normally, as anyone else would have done.

Really surprising, incomprehensible, outrageous is that personalities and organizations that were honored and

recognized for their defense of democracy and the respect for human rights, who are entitled to watch over these rights, use their privileged political and social positions to act as guarantors of this fifty years old form of contemporary slavery. Many of these personalities, organizations and institutions, in an attempt to justify the inexcusable, use two hypocritical arguments: 1) they support the regime with the purpose of supporting a democratic opening within the island; and 2) they do not state their opinions about the existing situation in Cuba because they do not want to interfere in internal affairs. Here I offer with major respect my modest answer to both excuses: 1) since the very moment that paltry personal interests are favored, these distinguished men take sides with the government, they are flagrantly interfering in the internal affairs of my home country; and 2) you don't need to be political experienced to understand that the responsibility to solve this catastrophe and to find a way to re-establish the rights, the liberties, the prosperity and the happiness within our beloved and tortured nation, falls solely upon us, the Cuban people.

And in conjunction with the down here abolished freedom to travel, last March 23rd the local press published some commentaries and critics related to the changes within the policy towards Cuba that are included in the new Budget Act enacted by the President of the United States. I could not believe what I was reading, although I am used to the traditional inconsistencies between the word and the action of those who govern our country! In the said text there was a complaint about the fact that "the parents-in-law" are not considered "authorized family members" to travel annually to the island. And this complaint is emitted by a government that cruelly maintained and is still maintaining by force separated the fathers, mothers and children, grandparents, nieces and nephews, husbands, brothers etc., to whom it mercilessly refuses travel permissions that are necessary for the family reunions. The mentioned article concludes criticizing "the measures that were recently approved within the United States, because they do not return the right to travel freely to Cuba to the Cuban people who live over there, nor is the right of the citizens of this country to visit the

neighboring island regarded".

No government should take on itself the authority to hamper the sacred family links. Nobody should consider himself superior to God and desecrate this marvelous and divine masterpiece of family institution. However, it results paradox and hypocritical that the Cuban authorities now defend the right to travel freely to the formerly exiled ones, the repudiated ones and the so called traitors, and in unison they infringe with impunity on the same right with regard to us who stayed within the country. Since fifty years, we, the inhabitants of this island, cannot practice tourism. And I am referring to free tourism with which everybody decides freely and supremely. There have been two reasons for this: we lacked the necessary money and the government did not permit us to travel. And today, after half a century of sufferings, sacrifices and privations, those born in Cuba watch stunned how the government press defends the right of North American people to travel, to enjoy, to entertain themselves in the tropics; we watch the official media turning itself into representatives of the rights of this kind of tourists, of the very same North Americans that some decades ago they expelled from the country, screaming "Yankees go home". We, the Cuban people, are as much children of God as the rest of the human family. We have been created by Him, to his image and his resemblance, free, unique, unrepeatable, capable of thinking with our own brains and suitable for democracy and liberty. We have absolutely the same inherent rights on the grounds of being thinking creatures and not only the few mutilated rights the government and their foreign associates think we deserve. The obligation to achieve permissions to entry and to leave our home country that is imposed on the people of Cuba constitutes an outrageous violation of elementary rights and liberties; and is the contemporary version of the dismissive methods of slavery of past centuries. When the most excellent personalities and organizations within the international area lavishly give help and praise the managers and perpetrators of such violations, they turn themselves into accomplices of these abuses and hence contribute to the perpetuation of our nation's agony.



*In the region promoting market democracies
internationally committed to human rights*