

Castro's Closest Friends Need Him to "Get Well Soon"



Fidel Castro's circle of friends may be dwindling, but two remain unwaveringly by his side. Within days of the announcement of the Cuban dictator's recent illness, both Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and long-time "Frente Polisario" rebel army leader Mohammed Abdelaziz sent Castro wishes for a speedy recovery.

"Know that we [the Non-Aligned Countries] need you, your wisdom and your expertise," affirmed President Bouteflika.¹

"All the international community is awaiting your quick recovery and we will be waiting with millions of other peoples around the world this happy news," declared "Frente Polisario" leader Abdelaziz.²

Those wishes weren't just empty words. They sincerely represented Algeria and the "Frente Polisario" desire to keep a nearly 40 year relationship of cooperation from dying.

Fidel Castro set his sights on Africa and sought to create a revolutionary army of mercenaries in the Sahara desert in the 1960's. From Castro's vision and with the financial and ideological support of the former Soviet Union, Libya and Algeria, the "Frente Polisario" was born—a rebel army which would eventually hi-jack a movement to end the Spanish occupation of the Sahara in order to prevent Morocco from regaining its pre-Colonial sovereignty over its southern provinces. While Castro ruled over an island and its people isolated by water, the "Frente Polisario" trapped nearly 80,000 Sahrawi refugees behind an impenetrable wall of sand.

Today, both the Cuban and Sahrawi peoples remain hostage to two oppressive regimes whose ties go back nearly four decades.

The most tragic victims of this corrupt brotherhood are the thousands of Sahrawi children who have been kidnapped at the ages of 8, 9 and up to 12 years old by the "Frente Polisario," and sent to Castro's infamous *Isla de la Juventud*. For sometimes 10, 15 and 20 years, these Sahrawi children are cut off completely from their families, language, culture and religion. Forced to work in sugar cane and

¹"Bouteflika à Castro: les non-alignés ont "besoin de vous." [Le Monde](#) August 2, 2006.

² " 'Get Well Soon' Letter for Castro." [Washington Post](#) August 14, 2006.

tobacco fields and subjected to Castro's Communist, anti-American ideology, Sahrawi children are robbed of their childhood.

Today, it is estimated that Cuba still harbors between 2,000-3,000 Sahrawi children kidnapped by the "Frente Polisario" each year.

Yet, as Fidel Castro lies in his sick bed, his former right-hand men are rising up to shed light on decades of oppression. Former Castro henchman, "Juan Vives" is now an outspoken critic of the Cuban dictator's plan to destabilize the United States' long-time ally, Morocco, by wreaking havoc in the Sahara desert. In his recently published memoir, *El Magnífico*, Juan Vives describes how "Frente Polisario" fighters were molded and trained to create an army across the Atlantic "in the image of "Che" and Castro himself."³ Dariel Alarcón Ramírez (a.k.a. "Benigno"), one of the five surviving members of Che Guevara's infamous "Bolivia Force," now recalls publicly that Sahrawi children were brought in by the boatload at very early ages and placed in military schools to learn tactics of guerilla warfare.

Even Sahrawi children deported to Cuba—now adults—are speaking out about their stolen childhood and destroyed families at the hands of Fidel Castro and the "Frente Polisario." Last fall, Sadaani Ma Oulainie, who was taken to Cuba at the age of 9 for 16 years, and Ghalli Bentaleb, taken at the age of 10 for 13 years, traveled to Florida to denounce Castro's and the Frente Polisario's cruel practice of separating families with Cuban-American human rights activists in Miami.⁴ Despite an ocean of difference between them, members of the Cuban exile community and former Sahrawi refugees both could relate to shared accounts of Communist indoctrination and decades-long family separation. Sadaani and Ghalli even shared their testimonies with US Rep. Ilena Ros-Lehtinen, whom they had only previously known as "La Loba Feroz" ("The Ferocious Wolf") from songs taught in Castro's schools. Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen strongly acknowledged that, "This is just another part of the tragedy of Fidel Castro which isn't talked about much; you don't see it on television, but it is happening daily. It is the separation of families, by Fidel Castro, the propaganda, the brain-washing which is also a part of Fidel Castro's mission."⁵

It is no wonder that Algeria and the "Frente Polisario" have such strong wishes for Fidel Castro's speedy recovery—for without "his wisdom and expertise" their political ambitions wouldn't have gotten off the ground nor survived this long. After all, Fidel Castro and the "Frente Polisario" realize that there is less and less tolerance for stifling anti-democratic regimes and their human rights abuses. And despite the well-wishes of a few, many thousands of Sahrawis and Cubans still know that their long-time oppressors belong to a dying breed.

For more information, please contact the Moroccan American Center for Policy
www.moroccanamericanpolicy.com

³ Vives, Juan. *El Magnífico : 20 ans au service secret de Castro*. Paris: Hugo et Compagnie, 2005.

⁴ Corral, Oscar. "Western Sahara Refugees relate their hardships." *The Miami Herald*. September 19, 2006.

⁵ Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL), September 19, 2005 Press Conference in Miami, Florida