
SL was the first Asian Country to establish Diplomatic Relations with Cuba- Deputy Minister Marcos

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STATEMENT BY DEPUTY MINISTER MARCOS RODRÍGUEZ AT THE CEREMONY ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBA AND SRI LANKA Venue: Casa de la Amistad, ICAP Date: 29 July 2009 H.E. Mrs. Tamara Kunanayakam, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in Cuba; Comrade Alicia Corredera, Vice-President of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples; Comrade Alberto Rodríguez Arufe, Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications; Distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps; Distinguished guests; Ladies and gentlemen: It is a great deal of satisfaction to be here, this afternoon, on behalf of the Cuban people and Government, in order to celebrate, along with the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, at this hospitable venue of Casa de la Amistad (House of Friendship), the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Cuba and Sri Lanka.

As we get ready to commemorate such a significant date, this opportunity is also auspicious to express just recognition for the sister Republic of Sri Lanka, as it was the first Asian country to establish, only a few months into the victory, diplomatic relations with the nascent Cuban Revolution, a sovereign gesture of unforgettable friendship that will always live on in the heart of our people, which we are joyously celebrating today. Logically, it was also Sri Lanka one of the countries visited by our beloved Commander Ernesto Che Guevara in the context of his tour of the region in August 1959; a country in which he left an indelible mark, not only by planting a tree that is now growing as luxuriantly as his revolutionary ideas, but also by seeping into the minds and hearts of several generations of Sri Lankans, who are now actively integrated into the large movement of solidarity with Cuba that exists in that brotherly country. As a genuine result of that sentiment of brotherhood that has lovingly stood the test of time, we must underscore the successful holding in Colombo, last year, of the IV Regional Meeting of Solidarity with Cuba, which was, without a doubt, another indication of the endeavors, the desires and the will of the Sri Lankans to strengthen our historical bonds of friendship and to contribute to the unity of Cuba's friends in the Asia and Pacific region. Ladies and gentlemen; Distinguished guests, Geographic distance, as well as cultural, ethnic and religious differences, have never become an obstacle preventing our relations of friendship and cooperation from being increasingly solid. On the contrary, it has been that diversity that has solidified those bonds in the best spirit of non-aligned countries and nations of the South. Throughout these fifty years, bilateral links have been characterized by mutual respect and understanding, as well as by both countries' attachment to the principles of International Law, as enshrined in the United Nations Charter. At the multilateral level, the cooperation and exchanges existing between both countries must be highlighted, as there has been close coordination on and support for various issues pertaining to the international agenda, based on the challenges that we must address given our similar condition as developing countries and members of the Non-Aligned Movement. As part of this spirit, our country, both at the national level and in its capacity as Chair of NAM, did not hesitate for a second to strongly oppose the pressures and practices of imposition, selectivity and politicization used by the West to try to hold the Sri Lankan Government in condemnation over alleged human rights violations, particularly at the recent XI Special Session of the Human Rights Council. Cuba takes pride in the traditional and historical support of the Government of Sri Lanka for the just demand of the Cuban people that the ruthless and unjust economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed on our country by the US Government nearly fifty years ago be lifted. Only a few days ago, in Egypt, Cuban President, Army General Raúl Castro Ruz, held a fraternal meeting with President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the XV NAM Summit, in which the mutual interest in further promoting greater bilateral links was ratified, as well as the will to continue enhancing the objectives, principles and interests that brought the Movement into being, which are fully valid and pertinent under the current international circumstances. In this context, the outstanding role played by Sri Lanka within NAM cannot be forgotten, as it is a founding member of it. Just like Cuba, it had the high responsibility of chairing the Movement since 1976 through 1979. It also fills us with joy that Sri Lankan youths have had the opportunity to graduate in our country, as this is a real symbol of the level reached by our bilateral links and a modest contribution by Cuba to the training of human resources for Sri Lanka. As we speak, 26 youths are engaged in university studies in various higher education specialties, rekindling the tradition of excelling for their discipline, dedication and positive school results. May this occasion also serve to reiterate our solidarity to the brotherly people of Sri Lanka, a victim for so many years of an internal conflict that has worn out the nation, reduced its possibilities for development and caused the death of thousands of people. In doing so, we would also like to wish them a speedy recovery and success in the process of rebuilding the country, which we are sure your people will embark on with a high spirit of unity, sovereignty and independence. Before concluding my remarks, I would like to express sincere wishes and our firm commitment to continue working in order to further enhance the excellent relations of friendship, brotherhood and cooperation binding our two countries. Long live the friendship between Cuba and Sri Lanka! Thank you very much.