

## **SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. ENRIQUE ORTA**

Honorable Speaker of the National Parliament, Mrs Baleka Mbete, Honorable Members of the Parliament, Colleagues, friends, I would like to start expressing our appreciation and gratitude to the PMP (Parliamentary Millennium Program) and especially to the Speaker of the National Assembly, H.E. Mrs. Baleka Mbete for the organization of this necessary event and for inviting us to be part of it.

So, in a way I think that our gathering today, should served to recover and claim back the significance of the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale not only for being an historical event, but for what it truly represents in the history of Southern Africa today and more important for the need to make aware the young generations of the sacrifices made in order to get freedom in the Continent.

When I was preparing this paper I was thinking that the debate over the significance of Cuito Cuanavale has been intense and a whole week will not be enough for a conclusion, so I thought I need to find one expression that could gather, at least for me, the real significance of that victory, and I was sure that no other than Nelson Mandela made that expression when asserted "Cuito Cuanavale was the turning point for the liberation of our continent"

...and referring to the Cuban contribution declared "the Cuban internationalists have made a contribution to African independence, freedom and justice unparalleled for its principled and selfless character." The Cuito Caunavale victory demonstrated that the vision of internationalism based on sisterhood and brotherhood is not a fanciful dream. Cuba has showed through out 49 years of Revolution that another and better world is possible based in the real solidarity.

Looking back to the Battle the invading troops were unable to break the resistance, courage, determination and valor of the Cuban – Angolan and SWAPO forces in Cuito Cuanavale. This important victory led to a new and definitive shift in the negotiations to seek peace in southwestern Africa. The important peace agreement were born and developed on the battlefield, where Cuban, Angolan and Namibian fighters mixed their sweat and blood.

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The imperialists couldn't understand the reason of Cuba's internationalism and solidarity with the African continent. United States even today can not understand the audacity of a small country like Cuba – blockaded and threatened – and yet capable of fulfilling an internationalist mission of this nature.

They simply couldn't conceive of such a thing. But the fact that small Caribbean country had been able to support its African sister nation, was something that went beyond their parameters, their conceptions and their standards.

The fact is that Cuba had no economic interest in Angola or in Africa. Cuba was in Africa by virtue of its internationalist principles, by virtue of its feelings of solidarity, because it was fulfilling its duty to help peoples, it was fulfilling its duty to help the peoples of Africa against apartheid, against racism, against colonialism, against foreign aggression. We did not go to Angola seeking economic benefits not to defend strategic interests. Cuba did not leave behind, on the soil of our brother nations, military bases, properties of any kind nor rights to Angolan riches.

Cuba is often described as the only foreign country to have gone to Africa and gone away with nothing but the coffins of its sons and daughters who died in the struggles to liberate Africa. I would like to point out that indeed we took from Africa one of the most valuable riches that have a great significance for the Cubans - the love and respect of its abnegated peoples.

More than 300 000 Cubans assisted in one way or another by the rest of the Cuban people had victoriously written one of the most honorable pages in the history of internationalism. Being internationalist is paying our debt to humanity. Whoever is not capable of fighting for others will never be sufficiently capable of fighting for himself.

Thank you.  
Enrique Orta