

## [Excerpts from an interview given by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, to Andrea Mitchell related to the case of Elián González.](#)

### **Auteur:**

- [Mitchell, Andrea](#)

**Andrea Mitchell.** - We were talking earlier about the child who has remained in the United States, about the damage this could cause him. You were saying that the longer he stays there, the greater the chance that his personality will be altered. What are your concerns with regard to this matter?

**Fidel Castro.** - One of the things that has most upset the people is that this child has been overwhelmed with sophisticated toys; they even put him in a toy airplane pretending he could be a pilot for the Brothers to the Rescue. They have dressed him in clothing and T-shirts with the emblems of the infamous Cuban-American National Foundation, which in any case is not national but binational since it is made up of ex-Cubans and a number of Americans. This has hurt our people very, very much.

The day before yesterday I was reading in the wire cables that young Mas Santos --I do not know if he is a saint (Santo means "saint" in Spanish) but he is certainly naive and disrespectful to the President of the United States-- tried to take the child with him to an electoral fundraising dinner presided by Clinton. For a people with a high political culture, the fact that a child was taken to such function is extremely offensive, especially since he was taken by none other than the man who is currently the chairman of that Foundation created many years ago by the United States government for very specific purposes, and which is even involved in terrorism. Taking the child to this fundraising dinner for a political party was really going too far.

I know, for example, that the boy's father and family here in Cuba have gone for 48 hours without being able to talk to the child because first they were dressing him up and getting him ready for the fundraising dinner, and then, on Sunday and Monday, they took him to Disney World to have his picture taken with all those fantasy figures and spend the night in a cabin there.

During those 50 hours, the family was not able to talk to the child. They were only able to finally talk to him last night, and the conversations are meted out, rationed, and under pressure.

These things are disturbing and they have raised concern among leading scientists, psychologists, specialists in child psychology and education, because something vicious is being done to this six-year-old child, in view of the whole world. Next Thursday, two days from now, there will be a round table discussion with some of the most qualified people in the field and the subject will be related to this case: how long it takes to change the mind of a six-year-old child. This is why the time factor is so important. It is not just a question of sparing more suffering to the family, terrible suffering; the father especially is suffering terribly and the grandparents, too. These are the people with the right to the custody and care of the child. It is not a question of a few days more or less. This is a vital question: the time it takes to change the mind of a six-year-old child.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - Is there any concern that at some point the child may say that he wants to stay in the United States? That he will be seduced by all those toys and all those things?

**Fidel Castro.** - No. Gabriela Mistral --we were talking about this when I told you about the article published yesterday in the workers' newspaper-- said that children do not dwell in the future or the past,

but in the present. And in view of the whole world, they are trying to dazzle this child with all these things. His father and the rest of the family have said to us that the child is being coerced, very strongly coerced, and the distant relatives in Miami have told them that the child has said that he does not want to live in Cuba; they have crudely declared this. According to a publication from Miami, a radio station reported that the child was overheard whispering to a distant cousin that he did not want to go back to his father.

The problem is that the boy's real family here in Cuba cannot resign themselves to this idea, and the people cannot resign themselves to the idea that these shameful maneuvers are being used to alter a child's mind, to uproot him from his real family, his most intimate loved ones, to break all the ties between this innocent and helpless child and his family, to destroy them. What would be left of this child's identity?

Therefore, we want to learn from the scientists and specialists how long it takes to change the mind of a child at this early age.

I have asked several people: Can a child's mind be altered in a month? And they have told me --several people, not specialists-- that yes, it can be altered in a month.

I have asked myself, why are they delaying this? Could it be because they want to change the child's mind, to destroy this child's mind? What will this child's psychological condition be like? How will he adapt to being with his real family again? And I know that his family is aching because at times they have sensed a certain shyness in the child that was not there before, as if someone were trying to destroy his love for his father. This is a crime, one of the most hideous crimes ever committed.

If somebody saw a child being murdered, having his life torn away little by little, they would certainly be against it. If they see that a child is having his mind destroyed, completely altered, for shameless propaganda purposes, then it is worse, worse than physical death, and I am sure that many people have come to realize that it is the obliteration of a six-year-old child's mind that is at stake here.

After all this, I do not know how anyone, how any U.S. leader, can talk about human rights --this without entering into other areas, only this one-- if they allow something like this to happen in their country. And our people are not willing to let that happen, quite simply. This is the current situation, and it is not easy for our people to resign themselves to the way things are being handled.

Everyone was informed yesterday --also by television-- that the boy's father had agreed to be interviewed by an U.S. official, and to turn over documents proving his paternity. Why is the solution being delayed? That is the key question.

The day after tomorrow will be a very important day because the entire population of Cuba will find out about the effects, on the mind and the psyche of this child, of the prolongation of this kidnapping and his subjection to all the things they are using to overwhelm this six-year-old boy. Science will have the last word, and we truly are concerned because the people are impatient, the mood of the people is one of bitterness and great indignation.

Will our people resign themselves to this? They will not make war, they will not turn to violence. Firstly, we believe we have enough influence with the people to discourage any acts of violence; secondly, these are educated people and they understand. In other words, it will not be a violent struggle but a battle of national and worldwide opinion, and this battle will not let up until that child is returned. This is what I want to tell you in all sincerity.

Right now there is an impasse, there are no mobilizations; but if this is prolonged even a minute longer than is tolerable, they will start up again. There will not be any material damage, for two reasons: our people's highly developed political culture and the influence of our country's leadership, and our political and mass organizations that our people trust. And so, I do not see any danger in this. Where will

our energies be focused? On a battle of opinion, not only nationally but internationally as well.

I believe that the U.S. authorities have placed themselves in an unsustainable position. This battle will be kept up one way or another until the child is returned to his family and his homeland.

We are currently in an impasse, really; I hope this is not prolonged. For us, it has been very, very difficult, while the child is being held there, a source of great concern to our people, to prevent them from expressing themselves like the people in that painting, for example, (he points to a painting on the wall by the artist Mariano, depicting a revolutionary crowd) by one of our best painters.

At this particular moment, there are no mobilizations, no demonstrations. Believe me, we do not like to say this but in all sincerity I tell you that from the beginning we did everything possible to prevent all this. To begin with, my words were misinterpreted when I said, "It will not be long before a great protest is unleashed in Cuba and the world..."

I think that some progress has been made, I concede that much, that is, this past Sunday and Monday, as a result of the exchanges of diplomatic notes between the two governments. I would say that progress was made in those two days since conditions were created for an honorable solution.

The requirement identified as the main obstacle was adequately fulfilled with the meeting sustained by the father and the rest of the family with the representative of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the head of political affairs at the Interests Section.

The proof of paternity is irrefutable. They asked the father for papers to prove that he is in fact the father, and yet they turned the child over to distant relatives never asking for a single piece of paper to demonstrate that they were the child's great-uncle or some other family member.

Progress has been made. Yet, I can see that there will be other problems in their minds and there is the danger that a solution will be unjustifiably and perhaps even indefinitely delayed, as I said before. Given that this is a case of a child being spiritually and mentally murdered, the time in which this can possibly be prevented is limited.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - Is there any message you would like to send to Bill Clinton with regard to this?

**Fidel Castro.** - No, not a particular message. Many people in the United States appreciate Clinton and there are enough people there capable of advising him. I have my own perception of him, which I told you about the first day we spoke. I have the perception that he would like the child to be returned as quickly as possible. I have my doubts about whether he will be able to achieve this, however, because who knows what kind of legal maneuvers will be undertaken by the others to delay this process? Delaying the arrival of this child awaited by the entire population would actually have a very negative effect on the mood of the people. That is the truth about this matter.

From the very beginning we tried to prevent this heated feud. I already told you that I was only able to begin attending to this matter on December 2. The child's father wrote a letter on November 26, and on November 27 our Foreign Ministry presented a note. There was no reply for 11 days. It was only on December 2, six days after the father had submitted his letter that I could personally attend to the matter. I invited him to come and talk to us because we wanted to know more about him, how he felt, what he wanted, what kind of relationship he had with the child. I personally discussed with him all these crucial details. We needed to know the whole truth before we moved a finger.

As you can understand, a national and international battle of opinion cannot be waged but on solid foundations.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - You must know that some people in the United States have said that the father has been coerced by the government and he has not been allowed to speak freely.

**Fidel Castro.** - And how can we prove that this is false? Does he have be taken off to Miami like a meek lamb to be devoured by the terrorist mob and the extremists tolerated and supported by the U.S. government, in connivance with the authorities, judges and venal officials? From the very first moment --we are certain of this, and have proof-- he said that he did not want to travel to the United States. He also said that he was demanding the immediate return of the child, and that he would not even accept any contact with the Interests Section.

Cárdenas' population is of tens of thousands of people who know him and the family well: doctors, teachers and many other decent, honest people. But, what was happening to him? He was not left alone for a minute, day or night. He has a telephone in his house, everyone got the number and they kept calling him, a mob of reporters, phone calls day and night. He was deeply shocked by the kidnapping of his son truly believing that he had every right to his child, whom he had cared for so attentively and lovingly. The child often slept with him and his new family, because the mother sometimes had to work very late, until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. The father had a new wife and a three-month-old baby, and little Elián slept with them in the same double bed.

On the hospital certificate it reads as follows: "In case of emergency, contact the father." So, he was a father who truly cared about his son, almost obsessively, I would say.

He was the one who wrote the letter requesting support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nobody said to him, "Write a letter." He wrote it a few hours after receiving word that his son was in an U.S. hospital. The man was terribly shocked given his close relationship with his son, and was constantly calling the child when they allowed him to talk to him.

When I visited the school, I found that the father was exhausted; his wife, who was nursing the new baby who had just turned three months, was tense and sick; the baby had had diarrhea for three days. You see? And so he left his house and has been living elsewhere with his wife and son. We have kept him informed, step by step, every detail of the developments in this matter.

He was informed about the letter sent to him by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, with details of everything they were requesting. Very little time had passed since the problem had begun. The first reply arrived on December 8, that is, 11 days later. We sent our reply on December 9 at 3:12 in the afternoon. Our diplomatic note contained remarks and various questions related to certain legal and judicial concepts covered in their note.

On December 9 at 4:20 p.m., officials from the U.S. State Department had a conversation in Washington with the head of our Interests Section, which lasted close to two hours. We received a full report on the content of that conversation, which addressed the remarks and questions in our note from the morning of December 10.

That same day, we wrote another note, around seven or eight pages long, double-spaced, where our position was clearly laid out to the State Department. We had to wait about 50 hours for a reply to this message, which only arrived on December 12, that is, Sunday, at about 10:30 in the morning. It was a brief note. They insisted on the decisive importance of a meeting with the father although it had been explained that the father had delegated authority to his own mother for that purpose. They did not completely rule out the possibility of accepting this, but take note: they insisted that the Interest Section officials' contact with the father was of paramount importance, really decisive.

In our response to this third note from Sunday morning, we reiterated our position and our previous arguments. We sent our response in the late afternoon, after we had certain crucial information, including some from our own Interests Section in Washington. In that note, we said that with regard to their concrete request of a meeting with the father --they had requested it-- they would be informed later that evening. We had to consult the family, because we could not simply send a note and tell them yes ignoring how the family, particularly the father, felt about it.

The family was informed. The father had to decide, and not just him but the whole family, everyone in the household. Late that same night on Sunday 12, they received a fully detailed report on everything that had happened, from the time the father sent his note to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs up to the content of the latest note received here that Sunday and the response sent in the afternoon, that as I said it explained in one of its paragraphs that a response would be given later as to the meeting with the father. It was crucial to contact the whole family, explain the situation and ask them for a response. I do not want to expose the content of the notes exchanged but I feel obliged to give you an idea of the discussions.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - Now then, if this impasse were to be drawn out, if the situation were not resolved, what would Cuba do? Because there is a certain fear in the United States that you will open up the borders and there will suddenly be another major exodus of refugees. Would this be an option?

**Fidel Castro.** - I do not think that this would be an option, since we are being particularly cautious as we are well aware of its importance. As you can see, viewpoints and arguments from both sides were calmly discussed yesterday, throughout the entire day. The meeting to review the migratory agreement was not obstructed in any way although it was closely related the child's problem because if it were not for the infamous Cuban Adjustment Act there would not be this case or many others.

The case of this child is a dramatic example of the consequences of the Cuban Adjustment Act, dating back 33 years. Illegal migration has been thus encouraged for 33 years.

We have kept this issue separate from the migratory issue. We have avoided all kind of interference; there was not even so much as an insinuation. We would have had more than enough reasons to suspend that meeting but we did not think it would be constructive to do it and to start mixing the migratory agreement with the concrete issue of the kidnapped child, although everything that has happened to this child and his relatives, and the people who died in that accident, is actually related to this law and other migratory provisions that serve merely to incite illegal emigration by Cubans.

There are hundreds of nations and thousands of ethnic groups in the world but only one nation and one mixed ethnic group to which they apply a migratory policy that is not applied to anyone else.

You may ask, "Do you want this to end?" To us it seems like the most constructive thing that could be done because if they decide to maintain this law then they would have to be asked to establish an Adjustment Act for all of the countries of Latin America, an Adjustment Act for Mexicans, Central Americans and South Americans. We are not so selfish as to want this law applied only to our country.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - But Mr. President, the U.S. government says that you are the only country that is still communist, the only country where there are no free elections, where there is no freedom of expression.

**Fidel Castro.** - If we got into this topic, your crew would run out of film. I do not think we should address these matters, if you will forgive me. I do not want to discuss that right now, I do not want to make comparisons. I do not think it would help much. We could talk about this matter for an entire day and fill up a ten-hour interview.

I will only say that I do not accept the claim that we are the only communist country and that there are no free elections here. I accept with pride the fact that we are a communist country, but we are not the only one, we do not have such a high honor. With our socialist and communist ideas, we have managed to create a social system which, in our very modest opinion --and we can prove it mathematically-- is much more humane and enjoys much more internal support than any system anywhere, because it is based on greater solidarity, greater fraternity and a complete avoidance of selfishness. Also, because its construction and development truly involve the participation of all of the people. In capitalist countries the people are at war with each other; this is a well-known fact. From Adam Smith to the almost fully

globalized world of today, we have had the opportunity to see what happens in the rest of the world and what does not happen here.

That is why, if you want to discuss these matters, I would suggest that it not be on this particular occasion. However, for the benefit of the American people that I know is very prejudiced I will say that that we are proud of our ideals, of the society built in Cuba where it has been possible to do the things we talked about earlier, after touring the Latin American School of Medical Sciences. But, we certainly do not have the honor of being the only communist country, that would be too much of an honor.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - No, I meant in this hemisphere.

Do you believe that the issue of the child could become a permanent obstacle between our two countries?

**Fidel Castro.** - No, because this cannot remain unresolved. No, because the United States cannot afford the terrible price of keeping this child kidnapped, and I have confidence in the American common sense, I have confidence in the common sense and the talents of its more realistic politicians, and they will not persist in this error. That is why it will not be a permanent obstacle. But it will, in any event, be a terrible example to demonstrate how much hypocrisy there is in this world and what terrible crimes can be committed, of which this is no more than a small sample.

We could talk about children who murder one another in U.S. schools. We are afraid that young Elián could be killed in a gunfight at school; we are afraid of the drugs consumed there, not here; we are afraid that in spite of the good material things in the United States, this child would not only lose his identity, but also be deprived of the many good things guaranteed to him in the country where he was born, in social, moral, spiritual and human terms. The most honest and patriotic people here are truly afraid of life in United States. And so, in our view, it cannot last. There is no way that this can last and so the case of the child will not become a permanent obstacle to relations.

I have already explained that there are important sectors in the United States that are supportive of the child's return. Therefore, when we protest and denounce this to the rest of the world, and wage a battle, we are also doing it for those within the United States who believe that the fairest and most proper thing to do is to return the child to Cuba. It is not a battle against the United States, it is not even a battle against all political sectors in the United States; it is a battle against those who oppose the return of the child so, it is a battle in favor of the United States. Yes, I say this in all sincerity because I am absolutely certain that the sooner the problem is resolved, the better it will be for your country's prestige, and the longer the delay, the more costly it will be from a political and ethical point of view for the United States' prestige.

I beg the American people not to consider me an adversary of their country but I cannot avoid holding the United States accountable for this crime. Let us say that, at least, we are struggling together with many in the United States who would like to see justice done and the child freed. After this is over there will certainly be some wounds to heal. However, our people will have gained a greater conscience and a slightly higher political culture than when this process began.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - Thank you very much, Mr. President. You have been very patient with us.

**Fidel Castro.** - I have had no need to be patient, it was a pleasure because I know that it has been constructive.

The time to talk of other matters will come. You can count on me for that.

**Andrea Mitchell.** - Thank you for receiving us in this institution. I think there are really a lot of interesting things to be said about this institution and about the ideas around it, and we will do it; we are thinking about reporting on it.

**Fidel Castro.** - I hope you will have enough time to broadcast at least a small part of everything I have said. (Laughter)

**Lieu:**

Latin American School of Medical Sciences

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