

On Receiving the José Martí Order

September 25, 1984

From September 25 to 30, 1984, Sankara headed a delegation to Cuba, where he met with President Fidel Castro and received the José Martí Order, the highest honor of the Cuban government, shortly after his arrival. Cuban Communist Party Political Bureau member and Minister of Culture Armando Hart spoke at the ceremony. The following are Hart's speech presenting the medal and Sankara's speech in response. They are translated from the French-language edition of Granma Weekly Review, October 7, 1984, published in Havana, Cuba.

Armando Hart

Comrade Fidel;

Dear Comrade Capt. Thomas Sankara,

president of the National Council of the Revolution and head of state and government of Burkina Faso;

Dear comrades of the visiting delegation;

Comrades:

Tonight we have the honor of acting on the resolution of our Council of State to confer on you, dear President Sankara, a high and very cherished distinction: the José Martí Order. Our revolution reserves it for very specific cases. It is a token of well-deserved recognition for those who have rendered outstanding service to the cause of their people, to international relations between our countries; to dignity and honor; or to the struggle against imperialism, colonial and neocolonial domination, and for genuine national liberation. You, Comrade Thomas Sankara, combine all these qualities.

First we should point out the deep feelings of friendship and solidarity with which the leadership of our party, our government, and the entire Cuban people have been following the revolutionary events

unfolding in the former Republic of Upper Volta, today known by its new name, Burkina Faso.

Revolutionary peoples, who have experienced the hard struggle for independence, dignity, and development, have no difficulty in understanding the efforts and battles of other fraternal peoples. They feel the need to extend direct political support and solidarity — something that is always important, but even more so at the outset of a revolution. This is how we feel toward the people of Burkina Faso, toward the process of renewal and transformation taking place in their country and toward their outstanding leader, Capt. Thomas Sankara.

President Sankara is a fine example of the role that patriotic military young people, with advanced ideas and deep commitments to the people, can and are playing in the struggle for the liberation and development of their countries. Comrade Captain Sankara has led the progressive forces of the army, the workers, and the young people of his country with admirable tenacity, intelligence, and courage. He has managed to frustrate reactionary maneuvers aimed at bringing the revolutionary process to a halt. You, together with your people, have blocked the reestablishment of the neocolonialist order with its accompanying poverty, oppression, and corruption — problems that the new leadership of Burkina Faso is combating.

We feel a deep identification with these objectives and with Burkina Faso's active international policy — a policy of solidarity with the African peoples, who face apartheid, the aggression of the South African racists, and domination by the forces of reaction and imperialism; a policy of support for national liberation movements and of adherence to the principles of the Nonaligned Movement; and finally, its policy of unity against imperialism and in the struggle for peace.

We are confident, dear Comrade Sankara, that this visit by yourself and your delegation, and your conversations with Comrade Fidel and other leaders of the Cuban revolution, will serve to further strengthen our fraternal bonds and will mark a higher stage of friendship and cooperation between our countries, which have been developing so satisfactorily.

Burkina Faso and Cuba have relations that were established very recently. Imperialism and colonialism separated us for a long time. But, in reality, our ties go back centuries and it is only now, in this era of revolution, that we can do them justice. In the past, countless sons and daughters of your country were uprooted from their native land and brought to Cuba in chains, as slaves for unscrupulous

exploiters. They contributed their labor and gave up their lives in the forging of a new nation, for whose independence they would later fight with admirable heroism. José Martí, the extraordinary Cuban who symbolizes the pinnacle of revolutionary thought in Cuba and America in the last century, and whose name has been given to this cherished award, expressed in burning verse his unforgettable impression as a child witnessing the terrible tableau of African slavery. He trembled with passion for those who cried out in pain and pledged to vindicate that crime with his blood. Today Fidel is completing the work Martí was unable to finish. In both Cuba and Burkina Faso revolution has made those dreams a reality.

Today, those who come to our two countries no longer come as men enchained in slavery but as men bearing the star of liberty. In this spirit, as an expression of friendship, admiration, and respect, dear Comrade Sankara, receive from the hands of Commander in Chief Fidel Castro the medal of the José Martí Order.

Thomas Sankara

Comrades:

Revolutionaries do not waste time throwing hypocritical bouquets to one another, an art reactionaries have perfected.

In presenting me with the highest distinction of the Cuban revolution, the Cuban people confer an honor on my people that is more than a symbolic gesture. It is a commitment of political support for my country, Burkina Faso, and its democratic and popular revolution. It is a firm commitment founded on the memory of one of the greatest patriots not only of Cuba and Latin America, but of all corners of the world where peoples are fighting for freedom and independence.

This distinction is a demonstration of the deep love the Cuban people feel for my people. Did not José Martí himself entitle his unforgettable work, "Love Is Repaid with Love"? José Martí, who at the early age of sixteen was deported from his country for his revolutionary political ideas, felt in his bones and his blood the reality of militant solidarity among the peoples of the world.

There is love among peoples; peoples know how to love. For nine years, Martí lived in the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala, where he was as one with the peoples and earned their love. Without that profound love, his two deportations of 1869 and 1879 could have discouraged him and sapped his morale. But in 1895 José Martí

returned to his country to take up arms against the colonial oppressors. This man who died at Dos Ríos fighting for the freedom of all the world's peoples belongs to us all — to Cuba and to Burkina Faso.

It is with the valiant blood of heroes such as he that peoples are nurtured and gather the strength required to wage increasingly important battles. Comrade Fidel Castro and his comrades in the Sierra Maestra in 1956 were simply carrying forward the revolutionary battle opened up by the Cuban people for their full freedom.

The revolutionaries and people of Burkina Faso, who spent years combating reactionary and proimperialist regimes, were continuing and today are still continuing the battle joined by José Martí. Cuba and Burkina Faso are so far and yet so near, so different and yet so similar, that only revolutionaries can understand the sincere love that pushes us irresistibly toward mutual support.

My country is small. It covers 274,000 square kilometers and has a population of seven million — seven million peasant men and women, who live under conditions identical to, if not worse, than those endured by your people under the fascist Batista dictatorship. Running water, three meals a day, a clinic, a school, and a simple plow are still elements of an ideal in life that millions of people in my country have not yet achieved after a year of revolutionary power. It must be said that the legacy of the past is heavy. It is under these conditions that the National Council of the Revolution and the people of Burkina Faso conquered state power and wield it today.

But there are positive examples such as yours that raise the morale of the less-determined, strengthen the revolutionary convictions of others, and spur people on to struggle against the centers of hunger, disease, and ignorance that still exist in our country.

We have been fighting, we fight, and will continue to fight to create with our own hands the material base for our happiness. In this fight we know we can count at all times on the firm support of the revolutionary people of Cuba and all those who have embraced José Martí's ideals.

May José Martí hear me!

May this medal guide me and my comrades in leading our revolution to victory at the service of the people who are demanding their share of happiness.

It is in no way accidental that our national slogan is one you know well: Homeland or death, we will triumph!