

## **Fidel Castro meets intellectuals in 9-hour meeting**

**Reuters**

**February 11 , 2012**

HAVANA, Feb 11 — Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro held his second lengthy public event in a week, this time a nine-hour session with writers and intellectuals, Cuban state media said today, in another showing he is doing well after serious health problems.

"Fidel with intellectuals: More than nine hours of dialogue with the infinite," said the headline on government website Cubadebate.cu.

The story described the meeting in which representatives from 22 countries discussed topics ranging from the sad state of the world, as Castro views it, to the 85-year-old comandante's health.

"We have to fight. We can't let pessimism win. It's our duty," he was quoted as saying.

The story said that everyone was "impressed by the vitality and enthusiasm of Fidel," and that those who spoke congratulated him "for his visible recovery."

The session was part of Havana's annual international book fair.

A week ago, Cuban media reported on a six-hour appearance before a group of admirers where the man who ruled Cuba for 49 years pitched a new two-volume biography of his early life, called *Guerrilla of Time*.

Cuban television showed a videotape of that appearance and in which Castro had to be helped to his chair, but was energetic, witty and totally in control of a rapt audience.

Cubadebate.cu had numerous photos of Friday's event, but so far no video has been shown.

Castro took power in January 1959 and was famous for speeches that went on for hours. But he had to cede power provisionally to brother Raul Castro, 80, in July 2006 when he fell ill with intestinal problems that nearly killed him.

He stepped down officially in February 2008 and Raul Castro succeeded him as president.

He was out of the public eye for four years before reappearing in the summer of 2010, but has stayed mostly in the background since then and appeared to be increasingly frail.

Before these latest two events, he was last seen publicly at a Communist Party congress in April, where he sat wordlessly as his brother took over as chairman of the party, the position he had held since its inception. — Reuters

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