

# Report of his wealth is 'rubbish,' Castro says

## In a special TV appearance, Fidel Castro derided a Forbes magazine estimate that pegged his personal wealth at \$900 million.

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**HAVANA** - Fidel Castro said Monday that this month's Forbes magazine report calling him one of the world's wealthiest rulers was "rubbish" as he made a special television appearance devoted to knocking down the story.

Castro spoke live on the island's daily public affairs program *Mesa Redonda*, or *Round Table*, which served as an official rebuttal of the Forbes report by the Cuban president and several top officials.

"I've been listening to this wickedness for nearly half a century -- I don't pay much attention," Castro said. "Neither lies nor slander are worth anything."

In its May 5 article, Forbes included Castro in a group of 10 leaders with "lofty positions and vast fortunes." The magazine estimated Castro's personal fortune to be \$900 million -- nearly double that of the \$500 million of Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and just under Prince Albert II of Monaco's estimated \$1 billion.

The article also refers to rumors of Castro's "large stashes in Swiss bank accounts."

"Why should I defend myself against this rubbish?" Castro said he asked himself before the appearance.

After a short introduction, the Cuban leader gave the floor to government officials including Central Bank President Francisco Soberon and Culture Minister Abel Prieto, who proceeded to defend Castro themselves.

"It is absolutely impossible that someone in the upper levels of government -- and especially not a leader [like Castro] . . . who is recognized by the Cuban people as an example of humility and self-discipline -- could maintain personal accounts abroad," Soberon said.

The bank official called the Forbes article "grotesque slander," and blamed an American press he said is "controlled by the Empire," and the CIA. He said he couldn't think of anything more "vulgar and ridiculous" than the magazine's claims.

In explaining its calculations, Forbes said it assumed Castro has economic control over a web of state-owned companies including a convention center, a retail conglomerate and an enterprise selling vaccines and other pharmaceuticals produced in Cuba.

Soberon, however, said all the money made from those companies is pumped back into the island's economy, in sectors including health, education, science, internal security, national defense and solidarity projects with other countries.

In the article, Forbes acknowledges that the estimates for all the leaders are "more art than science."