

# Castro laments 'irritating inequalities'

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HAVANA --

(AP) -- Fidel Castro leveled his harshest criticism of Cuban society since falling ill, saying Wednesday that a flood of foreign currency has created "irritating inequalities" within the communist system.

In an essay published in state newspapers, the 80-year-old Castro wrote "we are not a consumer society," but bemoaned some Cubans who use foreign currency sent from relatives abroad to set up illegal sources of profit. This while they continue to enjoy ration cards, free housing and healthcare and other social services.

"Not everyone receives convertible currency from abroad, something which is not illegal but which at times creates irritating inequalities and privileges in a country that does its utmost to supply vital services free of charge to the entire population," Castro wrote in the treatise titled *Self-criticism of Cuba*.

"The real and visible lack of equality and the lack of pertinent information gives way to critical opinions, especially in the neediest sectors," he wrote in the treatise, which was the latest in a string of "Reflections of the Commander In Chief" Castro has begun penning every few days.

The U.S. dollar was widely used in Cuba until 2004, when the government took steps to remove it from circulation and promote the convertible peso -- which now trades at an official rate 8 percent higher than the American greenback. The moves sought to strengthen the island's regular peso, which is used for state salaries and most government goods and services but worth about 25 times less than a convertible peso.

Castro singled out "the juicy profits" some Cubans earn running unlicensed taxi services, which include fleets of classic American cars.

Cuban officials concede the island's decrepit and overcrowded transportation system is on the point of collapse, but few here are allowed to buy new or used vehicles and can only own hulking U.S. jalopies built before Castro's 1959 revolution.

Using scarce gasoline for profit "can compromise the independence and life of Cuba. We cannot fool around with that!" Castro wrote.

Recuperating in an undisclosed location, Castro has not been seen in public since announcing last July 31 that emergency intestinal surgery had forced him to cede power to a provisional government headed by his 75-year-old brother, Raúl.

Castro's "Reflections" have suggested he is in little hurry to resume power.