

Cuba protests Bush's U.N. speech

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NEW YORK --

(AP) -- Cuba's foreign minister walked out of the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday in protest of President Bush's speech in which he said the "long rule of a cruel dictator is nearing its end" on the communist island.

The Cuban delegation issued a statement saying the decision by Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque to leave was a "sign of profound rejection of the arrogant and mediocre statement by President Bush."

In his speech, Bush looked ahead to a Cuba no longer ruled by Fidel Castro, the ailing 81-year-old leader who has not appeared in public in more than a year, since ceding power to a provisional government headed by his brother Raúl.

"In Cuba, the long rule of a cruel dictator is nearing its end," Bush said. "The Cuban people are ready for their freedom. And as that nation enters a period of transition, the United Nations must insist on free speech, free assembly and, ultimately, free and competitive elections."

Cuba's U.N. Mission said Bush had no moral standing to criticize anyone.

It accused Bush of responsibility "for the murder of over 600,000 civilians in Iraq" and for "the torture of prisoners" at the U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where more than 300 men are being held on suspicion of terrorism or links to al Qaeda or the Taliban.

"He is a criminal and has no moral authority or credibility to judge any other country," the mission's statement said. "Cuba condemns and rejects every letter of his infamous tirade."