

# **U.S. crusade against Cuban international medical cooperation**

## **Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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As MINREX warned in a statement released August 29, 2019, the United States government has, since last year, been waging an intense, offensive campaign against the medical collaboration Cuba provides, along with threats of sanctions against Cuban leaders and pressure on recipient states to end such cooperation.

Directed in detail by the National Security Council at the White House, the campaign has the active participation of Senators and Representatives associated with the anti-Cuban mafia in Florida and rabid State Department officials.

They accuse Cuba of alleged "modern slavery" and "trafficking in persons," referring to Cuban health system professionals, for the purpose of their exploitation and alleged interference in the internal affairs of the nations in which they are located.

The U.S. government is also attempting to re-establish the so-called "Parole Program for Cuban Medical Professionals," in existence until January 12, 2017, as the basis for active efforts to incite defection, offering to pay for travel and legal services, provision of U.S. visas and documents to collaborators in third countries, with the purpose of sabotaging bilateral agreements signed with these nations, depriving them of our services and depriving Cuba of highly qualified human resources.

In May of 2019, the secretary general of the Organization of American States organized a conference at its headquarters on the alleged crimes against humanity committed by Cuba in connection with our medical cooperation abroad.

In June, the State Department, in its 2019 Report on Human Trafficking, disparaged Cuba's international medical cooperation and, a month later, imposed visa-restriction sanctions on Cuban officials linked to medical missions.

Later, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), a U.S. institution that provides funds for subversion programs against the Cuban government, earmarked three million dollars for projects directed against Cuba's medical brigades abroad.

This U.S. persecution began in Latin America and has forced the suspension of cooperation programs in Brazil, Ecuador and Bolivia.

The servile, fascist Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro insulted and abruptly expelled our specialist doctors who, under a tripartite agreement with the Pan American Health Organization, effective August 2013 through November 2018, treated 113,359,000 patients in more than 3,600 of the country's municipalities, and provided permanent coverage to 60 million Brazilians.

In our country, 1,214 Brazilian students have completed medical school.

This decision allowed Bolsonaro to demonstrate his subservience to the U.S. government, while dismantling a program for low-income families, as part of a brutal policy to eliminate social gains made during progressive Workers Party governments.

Senior U.S. officials have used the slander that Cuban medical brigades in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are military troops, which Bolsonaro parroted, in September of 2019, during his speech in the United Nations General Assembly, maliciously or ignorantly tripling, in a ridiculous manner, the false, unfounded figure used by Washington.

Officials from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and U.S. embassies have turned to national authorities, as in Guatemala, to peremptorily and suspiciously request precise data on Cuban medical cooperation, looking for a way to eliminate it.

In May of 2019, the U.S. embassy in Ecuador asked senior government officials for detailed information on agreements and services provided by Cuban collaborators. Five months later, the Ecuadorian government terminated these programs precipitously, despite their imminent expiration, citing economic reasons.

Since the beginning of medical collaboration in this country, a total of 3,565 Cuban health professionals have provided their services, including 6,749,666 medical consultations, 212,360 surgeries, 3,548 births assisted, and 100,084 vaccinations administered. Some 153 collaborators participated in Operation Miracle, a program through which 168,543 surgical interventions were performed. As a result of the Manuela Espejo Solidarity Mission, 825,576 people were assisted, 35,257 of them in specialized neurophysiology and otorhinolaryngology consultations and 21,062 patients underwent clinical genetic studies.

Additionally, 2093 young Ecuadorians completed medical studies in Cuba.

In October, Ecuador's Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested information on the purpose of trips to the country by a group of Cuban citizens carrying diplomatic and official passports. Later, the Minister of Government offensively declared that several Cubans, associated with cooperation agreements, had participated in protests by the Ecuadorian people against the implementation of neoliberal measures, at that time.

As has been shown, no Cuban participated in or organized these massive popular demonstrations, and not a single official or diplomatic passport was improperly used. The manipulators have not been able to present a single piece of evidence.

The Cuban state issues diplomatic, official and service passports, in accordance with the provisions of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations, and guarantees that the holders comply with what is established for their proper use.

During the coup in Bolivia, the U.S. embassy in La Paz instigated, conducted, and participated in hostile actions by police forces and, surprisingly by firefighters, against Cuban collaborators. As was publicly denounced, U.S. officials participated directly in these acts, using a U.S. diplomatic car with license plate 28 CD-17.

During these days, there were 26 serious incidents against our collaborators, including the beating of two; public incitement to violence by coup authorities; brutal searches of

their persons, belongings and homes; false accusations; the arbitrary, temporary detention of 50 health workers, four for several days.

Faced with this situation, the Cuban government was forced to proceed with the immediate withdrawal of our personnel, while energetically condemning the false statements of the so-called minister of Health, named by the coup-plotters, who shamelessly exaggerated the value of stipends earned by Cuban medical specialists, in reality lower than those of Bolivian general practitioners, and concealing the fact that Cuba did not receive a penny as compensation for this cooperation.

The Cuban medical brigade in Bolivia, 54% female, was composed of 406 doctors in 32 specialties, including General Integral Medicine, Pediatrics, Internal Medicine, Gynecology and Obstetrics, Anesthesiology and Reanimation, Ophthalmology, General Surgery, Orthopedics and Traumatology, Intensive and Emergency Medicine, Neonatology, among others. Also performing outstanding work were 258 graduates in health technologies such as imaging, endoscopy, electromedicine, clinical lab testing, rehabilitation and nursing.

Over the years, they provided 73,330,447 consultations and 1,529,301 surgeries. Some 60,640 births were assisted; 22,221 vaccinations administered; and 508,403 ophthalmic surgeries performed.

Additionally, some 5,184 Bolivian doctors graduated from Cuban universities.

The persecution and search for information has included attempts to interrogate Cuban personnel by U.S. "diplomats" in the very health centers where they work, including in North Africa and the Middle East.

It is immoral and unacceptable to question the dignity, professionalism and altruism of the more than 400,000 Cuban health care collaborators who, over 56 years, have completed missions in 164 nations.

They have made outstanding contributions to the fight against Ebola in Africa, against blindness in Latin America and the Caribbean, and cholera in Haiti; in 26 brigades from the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disasters and Major Epidemics, in Pakistan, Indonesia, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Venezuela, among others.

With the same disinterest and dedication, 35,613 health professionals from 138 countries have been trained free of charge in Cuba.

In the case of nations with less favorable economic conditions, Cuba assumes practically the entire cost of collaboration. Similarly, and in line with United Nations conception of cooperation between developing countries, our support is offered in other nations on the basis of complementarity and partial compensation for services provided.

The Cuban technicians and professionals who participate in these programs do so absolutely of their own free will. During the performance of their missions, they continue to receive their full salary in Cuba, and also a stipend in the country of destination, along with other benefits.

When Cuba receives compensation for our cooperation, these collaborators are meritoriously providing a fair and totally legitimate contribution to the financing,

sustainability and development of our country's free, universal health system, accessible to all Cubans, as well as to cooperation programs provided free of charge, in many parts of the world.

As we stated last August 29, access to health care is a human right. The U.S. campaign against our international medical cooperation is a disgraceful, criminal act against peoples in need of medical assistance, which cannot overshadow the solidarity and human contribution of the 29,000 Cuban health care professionals, who, with enormous sacrifice and understanding on the part of their families, currently provide services to 65 nations.

The attitude of the United States government in this matter is despicable. Cuba's response is firm: we will continue to save lives, to seek health and well-being for the world, within the limits of our possibilities, wherever we are requested.