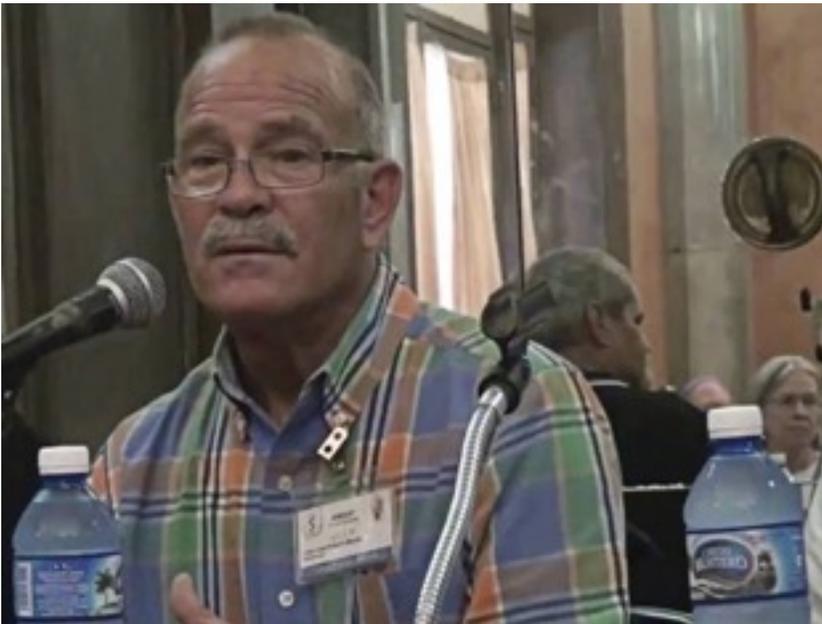


WORKERS WORLD



On July 22, 2016, the 27th Pastors for Peace Friendshipment Caravan participants met in Cuba with doctors who were veterans of the international campaign against Ebola in the West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The caravan travels yearly in solidarity with Cuba, challenging the U.S. travel ban. To volunteer or apply to be a caravanista, contact friendshipmentcaravan@ifconews.org or 212-926-5757, ext. 6.

The following excerpts were transcribed from a video produced by Joe Friendly for IFCO/Pastors for Peace.

Dr. Jorge Delgado, deputy director of the Central Unit for Medical Cooperation, who led the brigade in Sierra Leone: [Cuba has] been in 117 countries of the world in these 55 years, with more than 160,000 persons involved who work in the health care sectors.

Today we have 49,500 health workers in 62 countries. We have a special program in support of Venezuela that has been going on for a number of years.

Cuban medical collaboration has always been solidarity, mainly in support of the people. In 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck our brothers and sisters in New Orleans, we proposed to the U.S. administration that we would send a medical brigade. More than 10,000 health sector workers answered Fidel's call to form a special medical brigade to go to the U.S., named "Henry Reeve" after a young person from New York City who fought for Cuba's independence against Spanish colonialism. In 1876 Reeve died in combat in Cienfuegos.

Everyone knows that Bush did not accept the proposal to send the medical brigade after the Katrina disaster. To demonstrate that the Henry Reeve Brigade was here to stay to help the world, half of the brigade went to Guatemala to help after flooding there. And just to show we were not fooling around, there was the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005. In two months, 2,500 workers were sent to that country to help. They were located in 32 hospitals that Cuba also sent, with all equipment included, with nothing asked in exchange. We are Creoles, we are not accustomed to snow — we were there for eight months!

The Henry Reeve Brigade, after the events we have mentioned, has been in another 17 countries. We gave support to Haiti for the cholera epidemic and the earthquake, with 1,500 health workers.

When the Ebola epidemic took place in Western Africa, the United Nations and World Health Organization requested support from four countries — three rich countries, the U.S., France, England — and Cuba, where we are rich in solidarity, with human resources who have the training and ability to help other countries of the world in situations like these.

From July to September 2014 the international media spread the news of the catastrophe the countries were undergoing. It seemed that Ebola would invade all parts of the world. But for each person who died from Ebola, ten per day died from malaria — as is happening today in poor countries in Africa. But Ebola could spread throughout the world, so it had to be controlled where it was in order to prevent the spread.

The World Health Organization requested 165 doctors for Sierra Leone, 55 for Liberia and 37 for Guinea. We have many anecdotes from Cuba, considering all who traveled there. In a week, or to be more precise, in three days, there were more than 400 Cuban volunteers ready. In a week, 12,000 doctors and nurses were ready to go and struggle against Ebola. Many were upset because they were not able to go.

On Dec. 17, 2014, our colleagues from the U.S. heard the news about restored U.S.-Cuba diplomatic relations, along with those of us also serving there. So there was applause, greetings, but no hugs. In the protocol for prevention of Ebola you cannot hug or touch hands, but we touched our hearts; it was expressed that way.

The feeling was, OK, but we are working here together already. So although we were grateful for the official relations, the perception was we are already here on site, but now the working relations are official.

I finally want to say that our Minister of Health had a personal interview with Dr. Chan, secretary of the World Health Organization, in which our minister said, yes, Cuba is going to be there. Dr. Chan said, we know it is a critical disease, many die, but they should die with dignity, with someone to care for them until the end. That was the Cuban medical brigade.

We were able to reduce the mortality rate from its height of 85-90 percent. In Sierra Leone, we lowered that to 32-36 percent. So many lives were saved — the product of the medical attention of Cubans and the doctors and nurses of other countries, too. Dr. Enrique Betancourt, who served in Liberia: Everybody knows the enormous tradition of solidarity our country has had. In my case, I also had this tradition at home. My parents were among the first doctors and nurses who in the 1970s helped in the Republic of Angola. Going into my history, my father died in 1986 with Mozambique's President Samora Machel. So my mother always had this legacy of my father present in our home.

On Sept. 19, I was just changing duty, I was finished, I was at my work center, when I was asked if I was willing to participate in the struggle against Ebola. In spite of the tears of my wife who worked with me, the pride I felt at saying "yes" was very great — to undertake the legacy my father had given us.

I worked in Angola from 2010 to 2012, and the deaths from malaria were many, but nothing like Ebola. Not only because of the quantity, but also the degree of danger and the number of deaths that happened, the way the patients arrived, and above all the children.

Enrique Ubieta, the Cuban author of "Zona Roja: La experiencia cubana del ébola" ("Red Zone: The Cuban Experience with Ebola"), also spoke on the panel. The book tells the story of the 265 volunteer Cuban doctors and nurses who served in West Africa to combat Ebola. Many practitioners detail conditions on the ground created by imperialist ravages in the region that contributed to the spread of the deadly epidemic. The New York launch of the next Pastors for Peace Cuba Caravan will be held on April 15 at 7 p.m. at Holyrood Episcopal Church Iglesia Santa Cruz, 715 West 179 St.

PHOTOS: JOE FRIENDLY VIDEO

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