

U.S. denies visa to Cuban Health Minister to attend international health meeting in Washington

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Cuban Minister of Health and Dr. Felix Baez receive award for Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade, 2017.

Health ministers from throughout the Americas gathered in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 30, for a week of meetings to set regional health goals and priorities at the 57th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The meeting opened, however, without Cuba's Minister of Public Health Dr. José Ángel Portal Miranda. According to Reuters, [the United States denied his visa](#), intentionally preventing a leading public health official from participating in an international meeting.

"There can be no doubt that we, as a region, are making significant and tangible progress on the road towards achieving universal health coverage and universal access to health," [stated PAHO Director Carissa F. Etienne, in her opening remarks](#). These include the highest rating of any region on a global measure of health services coverage (79 out of 100 on the UHC Service Coverage Index).

Certainly, Cuba's white-coated army of doctors and generations of local doctors trained in Cuba's medical schools and deployed from Haiti to Venezuela contributed to the outstanding statistics included in PAHO's opening report.

The visa denial is part of the U.S. government's genocidal economic, financial and commercial blockade that has cost Cuba's universal health care system millions of dollars. According to a [news release](#) from the Republic of Cuba's Permanent Mission to the United Nations, "Between April of 2018 and March of 2019, losses to the Cuban healthcare sector amounted to \$104,148,178, a figure exceeding that of the previous year by \$6,123,498."

"This hostile policy hinders the acquisition of technologies, raw materials, reagents, diagnostic aids, equipment and spare parts, as well as medicines for the treatment of serious diseases such as cancer. These consumables must be bought in faraway markets, often through intermediaries, and this necessarily increases their prices," the statement said.

The U.S. slander campaign against Cuba's renowned medical internationalism and well organized public health system cannot erase the experiences of human beings in underserved rural and urban areas around the globe who received culturally competent medical care from Cuban doctors when no one else would help them.

In 2017, Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade (HRIMB) received international recognition at the 70th World Health Assembly, the global equivalent of the regional PAHO gathering this week, for "its emergency medical assistance to more than 3.5 million people in 21 countries affected by disasters and epidemics since the founding of the Brigade in September 2005."

The PAHO article continued, "A country of just 11.5 million people, Cuba has more than 50,000 of its health professionals serving in 66 countries. Cuba is also globally recognized for its preventive, community-based approaches to primary health care, disease prevention and medical education."

In 1999, Cuba founded the Latin American School of Medicine at the request of the historic Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Tens of thousands of young doctors have graduated since then and returned to their home countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean—nearly 200 of them to the U.S.—debt-free thanks to the generous Cuban scholarship awarded to them.

"Dr. Felix Baez, who survived Ebola infection while serving during the crisis in Sierra Leone and accepted the award along with the Public Health Minister, said that the award to the HRIMB 'confirms our commitment to continue our work, to go to the world's most difficult places and to serve people who are in greatest need. We want to keep doing this, and to save many more lives — no matter how difficult it gets.'"

LaBash has helped Doctors4Detroit in its efforts to recruit and support Detroit area students studying medicine at the Latin American School of Medicine.

