

Cuba's victory at Bay of Pigs made medical solidarity possible

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Cuban medical brigade departs for Angola April 9 to fight Covid-19. Photo: Radio Havana Cuba

Fifty-nine years ago, on April 17, 1961, Cuba defeated a U.S-backed invasion at the

Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón). The invasion's purpose was to destroy the Cuban Revolution. The CIA armed, trained and transported the right-wing Cuban force to Playa Girón. Because of the Cubans' strong political will and powerful leadership, the U.S. effort suffered a massive defeat. Fidel himself directed the military and worked alongside Cuban combatants to protect the Revolution.

I visited Playa Girón in 2019. While there, I learned that the U.S. supplied an advanced and deadly arsenal of weapons for the invasion. At the historical museum, a worker pointed out a Fortune 500 corporation's logo on a U.S. artillery piece. Imperialist war lines the pockets of all big business.

The accomplishments of the Cuban government and people should not be understated. The revolutionary leadership of Cuba drastically reduced illiteracy, homelessness and joblessness in less than a decade. Cuba nationalized all U.S. properties on the island in 1960 to provide for its people. Fidel initiated the Latin America School of Medicine (ELAM), which has trained doctors from all over the world.

Cuba has sent medical brigades to at least 59 countries to fight disease and poverty worldwide. There may be no better example of heroic medical internationalism than Cuba's. Every person in Cuba receives free medical care for their entire life. Despite the brutal U.S. blockade that prevents Cuba from trading with many foreign partners, the island has made important contributions to global health care.

Right now, Covid-19 is ravaging Black, Brown and Indigenous communities across the United States. Meanwhile the U.S. government refuses to protect the people and instead prioritizes bailing out massive corporations. The wealthy have near-unlimited access to testing and other health care resources. All the while, tens of thousands of working-class people with symptoms cannot get access to testing or proper care.

While the U.S. is letting its people die and spreading racist myths about China's response to Covid-19, Cuba has made heroic efforts to fight the virus all around the world. The Cuban government has dispatched medical brigades to more than 37 countries to fight Covid-19. During the pandemic's peak in Italy, Cuban doctors arrived on the scene immediately.

Over 40 countries have requested use of an antiviral drug that Cuba has been using to treat Covid-19. Cuban doctors developed the drug, interferon alfa-2b, working with a Texas doctor in 1981. Combined with other antivirals, alfa-2b has proven to be an effective treatment when given at the beginning of an infection and as a prevention method. Both China and Cuba have been using it to fight the virus, and it is produced by a joint Cuban-Chinese venture, Changheber. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration should immediately approve distribution of alfa-2b in the U.S. to save peoples' lives during this crisis.

Fifty-nine years after the revolutionary victory at the Bay of Pigs, U.S. aggression toward Cuba continues. The U.S. has relentlessly tried to destroy socialism and progress in Cuba. Yet Cuba continues to prioritize improving the lives of its people and of people around the world.

There is no better example of this than Cuba's heroic efforts during the Covid-19 crisis. It's time to end the blockade on Cuba and start using interferon alfa-2b in the U.S. to save peoples' lives.

