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Cuba's COVID-19 medical brigades are not medical diplomacy — they are international solidarity at its finest

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April 28, 2020



Photo: Ismael Francisco Gonzalez

On April 26, the latest medical brigade from Cuba's Henry Reeves contingent arrived in South Africa to join the front lines with those saving lives in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. After a 14-day quarantine, the 216-member group, made up of family physicians, epidemiologists, biostatisticians, health technology engineers and biotechnology experts, will be deployed to all nine provinces in that country.

This makes the 24th Cuban medical brigade, so far, to be requested during this international medical crisis from 22 countries. Cuba has made no distinction in

answering the call to every country that asked, no matter if they are rich or poor, if their government is led by progressives or neoliberals, socialist or reactionary. The virus does not recognize political borders, but the response to it is another matter.

The disastrous approach of the U.S. to the pandemic has unmasked the deep inability of the privatization of health care to meet the challenge materially or to muster any comprehensive and coordinated plan for the population, let alone participating in any collaboration with the community of nations. No, the U.S., in all of its exceptionalism, is only excelling in this crisis in intercepting personal protection equipment and ventilators meant for other countries. It excels in blaming other countries for the disease with wild unproven accusations. Instead of pitching in, the U.S. undermines the role of the World Health Organization by withholding funds and criticizes and pressures countries that are calling on the Cuban medical brigades to come to assist. There is an irrational desperation in all of this, one that begs the underlying question: what is in it for us?

Cuba is the quiet shining example of the exact opposite approach: giving not what they have leftover but sharing what they do have and that is a robust medical system accessible by all, blockaded for over 60 years but still able to produce world-class recognized medical biotechnical institutions that collaborate for the sake of humanity and not profit.

Cuba's approach is not to stumble and fumble opportunities waiting for the virus to arrive in patients who are already sick, but rather to send out electronic questionnaires to every home and, for those who don't have internet access, medical teams come to look for any evidence of the coronavirus and test all. Cuba, unafraid, aggressively goes out and finds the virus and applies the same measures to every person in the country while also sending their professional medical teams to any corner of the planet.

This world view of humanity first is ingrained in the soul and mind of every Cuban since the revolution in 1959, so when it comes to recruiting qualified medical workers to go on these dangerous missions there is never a shortage of volunteers.

Over 1,400 Cuban medical professionals currently make up these specifically COVID-19 brigades, and that number is expected to rise. The little island, 90 miles from the unfolding disaster in the U.S., has set the bar high when it comes to responding to the pandemic, and they have done it with no ulterior motives and expect little in return for their collaboration. This is not medical diplomacy we are talking about here. It is international solidarity at its finest. Cuba is simply holding up their piece of the struggle for humanity with humility and as much determination.

As a reference, Resumen is listing below all the details of Cuba's COVID-19 medical brigades to date.

1. Angola (219 health collaborators)
2. Antigua and Barbuda (26 health collaborators)
3. Barbados (101 health collaborators)
4. Belize (58 health collaborators)
5. Dominica (35 health collaborators)
6. Granada (5 health collaborators)
7. Haiti (22 health collaborators)
8. Honduras (20 health collaborators)
9. Italy, Lombardy (52 health collaborators)
10. Italy, Turin (38 health collaborators)
11. Jamaica (138 health collaborators)
12. Nicaragua (5 health collaborators)
13. Principality of Andorra (39 health collaborators)
14. Qatar (229 health collaborators)
15. Saint Kitts and Nevis (34 health collaborators)

16. San Vicente and the Grenadines (16 health collaborators)
17. Santa Lucia (113 health collaborators)
18. South Africa (216 health collaborators)
19. Suriname (51 health collaborators)
20. (11 health collaborators)
21. Venezuela (6 health collaborators) they have visited 23 states.

Technical Assistance

- São Tomé and Príncipe
- Mexico

Source: [Resumen](#)

