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# Attempts to undermine Cuban medical brigades will not succeed

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Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel greets returning medical brigade.

Every evening for the past two-and-a-half months, the people of Cuba have come out on their streets and porches to applaud and cheer for the 3,000 members of the Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade who are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic on the front lines in 28 countries with 34 brigades. For the Cuban people, these medical professionals are not just doctors going abroad, but representatives of a society where health and human life are considered an absolute priority.

After two-and-a-half months, the first brigade that had been in Lombardy, Italy,

returned home and was met at the airport by President Miguel Díaz-Canel via a video conference. He told them: "With your noble gesture and your brave disposition to defy death to save lives, you have shown the world a truth that Cuba's enemies have tried to silence or misrepresent: the strength of Cuban medicine! You represent the victory of life over death, of solidarity over selfishness."

In the last 55 years, 600,000 Cubans have provided medical services in 160 countries. And that entire time, the U.S. State Department has done everything in its array of dirty tactics to discredit them and undermine their purpose of administering health to poor people, most especially in Latin America. This included the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program (CMPP) from 2009 to 2017, whose whole reason to exist was to lure Cuban doctors away from their mission with promises of passage to the U.S., where there would be green cards and lucrative jobs waiting.

It never stops. Last year, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) — the agency that provides funds for subversion programs against Cuba — allocated \$3 million specifically for projects directed against the medical brigades abroad.

The example of Cuba's model of health care for all and sharing that view with the world sends the U.S. and the champions of neoliberalism into some kind of frenzy. It is the antithesis of the U.S. model of health that excludes millions and sends others into bankruptcy to pay doctor and hospital bills. Imagine a model like that minus the parasitic insurance corporations and pharmaceutical giants who want to control all medicine and legally sell it at any price they wish.

It is no wonder they will stoop to any depth to smash the prestige that Cuba maintains with the world. Can anyone think of just one sustained humanitarian mission made by the U.S. that did not have strings attached?

The Trump administration did not start this attack, but has escalated it by sweeping sanctions that now include an end of all remittances from Cuban Americans to their

families on the island. Over and over, Trump has denounced Cuba's medical brigades as constituting forced labor, ignoring the fact that in Cuba they have many more volunteers to go on these missions than positions to be filled, and that the biggest heroes to the Cuban people are their doctors.

As Cuba's example shines, the anti-Cuba crowd acts more desperate. Florida's lead anti-Cuba senator, Rick Scott, called for more punishment for Cuba's "human trafficking" by sanctioning any country that participates in Cuba's Medical Mission Program.

This period of crisis offers a great possibility for international cooperation between nations when it comes to medical assistance, as illustrated by the Cuban COVID-19 brigades. One of the criticisms from detractors of the program is that Cuba is receiving billions of dollars in revenue while only paying a fraction of that to the medical professionals. It is hard for some to look outside of the prism of capitalist relations because they can only see the medical industry in terms of profit to be made.

Why is it a crime that blockaded Cuba makes mutually beneficial agreements with countries that can pay for its services? The mindset of these brigadistas is quite the opposite of being oppressed, because they are fully aware that their contribution helps ensure that the payments contribute towards the entire Cuban population being afforded universal health care. And in practically all the countries the patients receiving the care of the Cuban doctors pay nothing. Their accommodations are not luxurious like that afforded to many doctors; they live with just the basics, because these are emergency missions in the pandemic focused on saving people's lives.

In many countries, including Argentina, where there is no Cuban medical brigade, unemployed doctors and professional medical associations have expressed varying levels of opposition. But this doesn't easily equate because one aspect of the Henry Reeve Medical Brigades, which were developed in 2005, is that they are specialized

and trained to hit the ground running to work in emergency triage situations, like natural disasters and quick-moving viruses. They come as a team made up of family physicians, epidemiologists, biostatisticians, health technology engineers and biotechnology experts, and many have the experience of being on previous international missions.

The Cuban brigades are not the long-term solution to the shortcomings in a country's health care system, but rather a stop-gap solution to an immediate need, as in Haiti after the earthquake in 2010, where they provided care for 40 percent of the victims, or in Western Africa in 2014 after the Ebola outbreak. Once again, it was Cuban doctors leading the fight with over 600 medical professionals, while Western governments watched. In 2015, a Henry Reeve Brigade went to Nepal after the earthquake there and treated 4,600 patients — many of whom, as the doctors reported, had never heard of the country of Cuba before.

In the fight against COVID-19, each country makes its own contract, its own timetable and its own area of need with the Cuban Ministry of Health. Some pay, while others only cover the cost of transportation and accommodations in their countries. The basis of these agreements is not about commercial transactions but rather cooperation, and importantly, every country that has applied to Cuba for a medical brigade during this pandemic has gotten one.

In the conclusion of his remarks to the returning medical team, Díaz-Canel said: "Witnessing the growing world clamor for our brigades to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize has filled us with healthy pride these days. With the mission you have completed, you have made a solid contribution to advancing this movement."

Díaz-Canel was referring to a blooming international campaign to nominate the Cuban medical brigades for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize, which will be officially launched in the U.S. on June 16 in a webinar with actor Danny Glover and Cuban Ambassador to the U.S. José Ramón Cabañas. To sign on to the campaign, go to

[www.cubanobel.org.](http://www.cubanobel.org)

Source: [Resumen](#)

