
What Will Be the Result of Cuba's Medical Collaboration?

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In times of crisis most citizens are expecting, more than usual, the decisions of the government and institutions.

Among the many things related to the new coronavirus, one side of it has called the attention at a global level of politicians, the media and, naturally, the beneficiaries. This particular twist in the pandemic was the determination of the Cuban government to send medical brigades to other countries that have demanded its support.

While I'm writing these lines, a dozen nations directly affected by the outbreak are receiving health personnel from Havana, including: Italy (specifically the Lombardy region, highly-affected zone), Venezuela, Granada, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Suriname, and Jamaica.

With the arrival in Andorra of a group of 39 health personnel, that small State became the second in Europe to receive Cuban collaboration against the pandemic. According to the media, there are more than 40 countries requesting Cuban aid.

In this panorama, what is the position of the U.S. government?

In an attempt to delegitimize Cuba's actions, Washington has insinuated that for Cuba it's a matter of recovering money lost after the cancellation of other health collaborations. On March 24th, a tweet from the official account of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Affairs, of the State Department, was explicit in this regard.

It's true that the closing of certain collaboration agreements (for example, that of the More Doctors Program for Brazil, by the end of 2018) supposed a financial blow for the Cuban state, which received profits, according to the contracts signed under the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a considerable fraction of the profits generated by the services given.

It's not fair, however, to affirm that the government and the internationalist doctors are acting purely for economic interest. The Cuban history of the last 60 years shows a supremacy of moral and ideological aspects as the reason of its international collaboration, over practicality.

As a solid example, it's worth recalling the response of Dr. Carlos Pérez Díaz, leading the Cuban brigade in Italy, to a question regarding payments, during an interview with the local press a few days ago: "We have not discussed any sort of payment. We are here to collaborate, the Italian government has assured room and board for us. Our action in this region is purely in solidarity".

It's not either appropriate to give credit to the U.S. government when they speak of "labor abuses" in order to speak of the activity carried out by Cuban professionals. Their concept of work - which cannot be accepted with universal validity - in this case takes up a recurring objective of its foreign policy towards Cuba: to slander medical collaboration.

Inside Cuba, a segment of the opinion wonders to what extent it's admirable to support the sending of health personnel, without affecting the domestic health service. However, despite the concerns generated in delicate times like the ones we are living in, a majority of Cubans support their country's participation in the world battle against the coronavirus.

For Alejandro Sautié, a 24-year-old engineer, the decision "is more than correct". Although he does not know the details of the agreements, he believes that if it's a matter of solidarity, it's well done. "So far we have the hospital and human capacity, so it's valid to send doctors abroad since that doesn't mean that we are going to run out of doctors here." It also exposes shows another face: "by helping the world, you are indirectly helping Cuba; for example, if the virus is eliminated in Italy there will be no fear that any Italian tourist will spread the disease here."

Yamir Pedroso thinks likewise, a university student who highlights that the collaboration has a matter of principles as background: "It's precisely right now that several basic principles of the Revolution, like solidarity and internationalism, must be present. Our doctors have always been there where they are needed most, as in the Haiti earthquake or the fight against Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, why shouldn't it be the same in this case? Furthermore, this shows the greatness of Cuba, which, even blocked, continues to take the first step to help where it's needed. "

In this regard, competent authorities have publicly repeated that, so far, the resources put at the service of other nations don't compromise Cuba's domestic health state of affairs.

What is the immediate impact, roughly speaking, abroad? It cannot be ascertained that the Cuban medical presence in other nations is free from criticism and controversial points aggravated by politicians and the media that oppose to it. Besides the usual North American hostility, the case in Argentina can be brought up, where individuals related to former President Mauricio Macri, as well as opponents of the current government have raised a wave of negative opinion while other factors have evaluated the idea of Cuban ??collaboration.

In the meantime, the Russian government praise the Cuban health brigades. The Andorran Ministry of Foreign Affairs shows his sovereign right to enter into cooperation with the Island, despite Washington's considerations. Italian MEPs send a thanking letter to the Embassy of Havana in Belgium. The Sao Paulo Forum, a regional political organization, also welcomes the humanitarian gesture.

It will be a bit difficult to shut down the role that Cuba will apparently play in this war against the coronavirus, especially in territories with a fragile health system, such as those of several countries in the Latin American area.

Across the Atlantic, Cuba's doctors also win the admiration of Europeans. On their stopover in Spain, on their way to Andorra, taxi drivers from Madrid airport honked their horns in the presence of the collaborators and generated a wave of applause. In Lombardy a billboard was raised in honor of the saviors from the Caribbean ...

Regardless political considerations, the most important thing that will last in the immediate future will be the lives of those who they manage to save in this war; that will be the greatest outcome.

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