
Cuba: also a forbidden destination in the scientific field

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The Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology is overcoming hardships caused by the US blockade. Its personnel finds alternative and new paths without cutting short projects and researches.

With the goal of producing avant-garde medicines for human, vegetable, and animal health, the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) is regarded as an effective scientific, investigative, and productive stronghold for Cuba's health care system. Its significance is increasingly affected due to the blockade imposed by the US on Cuba.

While facing such hardship, which is being labeled as "criminal," Dr. Marta Ayala Avila, deputy director of CIGB and member of the Political Bureau of Cuba's Communist Party stated emphatically: "As Cubans, this aggressive policy will not stop us. It encourages us to be creative and organized. Besides, it drives us to be more active in the technological and entrepreneurial monitoring system. The more doors they close, the more alternative we find."

This has been our stance for years! Otherwise, it would have been impossible for CIGB to merchandize nearly 14 products in more than 40 nations despite all the obstacles put into force by several U.S. administrations. The CIGB also develops unique medicines like Heberprot-P to treat diabetic foot.

In the public health field, for instance, the Center is developing 50 research projects, which comprehend cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, and cancer.

Likewise, some therapeutic approaches to cure chronic Hepatitis B are being researched. Such illness is a problem worldwide but not in Cuba as our health care system has already registered the Cuban vaccine HeberNasvac®.

This aggressive policy also shows up in the international collaboration, jeopardizing the possibility of scientific exchanges with health institutions in the U.S. “Even though the intention to exchange experiences among scientists is there, the funds allocated for researches are not accessible.

“Academic exchanges have dropped under Trump’s administration. For example, we hold every year four or five international symposia related to the main lines of our work. On certain occasions, we have enjoyed the attendance of a wide representation of US scientists, but it has actually dropped. The risk perception to visit Cuba has grown after all the defamatory campaigns and restrictions.

“It limits scientific collaboration. In fact, every time they come and see how canalized are our lines of research as well as the development of our products to cure Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases (cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, and cancer), they understand we have common points for both scientific sectors.”

In the field of farming research (a top priority taking into account its essential role in the food production), Dr. Ayala said that the CIGB has developed a new vaccine candidate against ticks, a common issue faced by the U.S. farming sector as well.

“The product was part of a study financed by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Six groups of different nations participated and the Cuban vaccine candidate had the best results (we were not part of the assessment) in terms of reducing ticks count in animals.

“We knew about it in a scientific event where the head of the project pointed out that, for political reasons, the research involving our vaccine candidate had to be terminated in a tangible indication of the negative impact of this aggressive and interfering policy.

“We are convinced this situation will not stop any of our researches. Nor will it stop the exchange with other actors worldwide. But it is not fair that a nation with such biotechnological development, with such pharmaceutical industry, experiences setbacks in a field meant for improving the health of its citizens for arbitrary and political reasons —the US blockade, for instance.”

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