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Seoul provides Cuba with Ebola protective suits

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South Korea has provided protective suits worth US\$1 million to Cuba in a bid to help doctors of the Latin American country do humanitarian work in Ebola-hit West Africa, a Seoul official said Tuesday.

Via the World Health Organization, Seoul has offered the Ebola protective suits to Cuba, which has sent hundreds of medical workers to Ebola-hit West Africa, said the official at Seoul's foreign ministry.

The aid comes as Seoul has joined global efforts to fight the highly contagious disease by sending a team of doctors and nurses to Sierra Leone.

South Korea plans to send a total of 30 medical workers in three batches to the West African country with its first team leaving for the mission on Dec. 13. Cuba has sent around 165 health care workers to Sierra Leone.

"South Korea does not hold diplomatic ties with Cuba, but Seoul's push for 'health diplomacy' is expected to help improve its relations with Cuba," the official said, asking not to be named.

In a surprise move, the United States and Cuba recently announced an agreement to restore their diplomatic relations that were severed more than 50 years ago.

Seoul's foreign ministry said that the government is making efforts to improve its ties with Cuba on the grounds that Seoul seeks to normalize its relations or promote cooperation with all countries beyond ideology and the political system.

Washington and Havana have harbored ideological animosity toward one another since Fidel Castro seized power through the 1959 revolution and chose to walk on a leftist path as an ally to the former Soviet Union. Cuba has maintained diplomatic relations with North Korea.

