

Cuba's internationalist mission in Jamaica: a troubling collaboration

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Executive Summary

This report examines the bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Jamaica, with an emphasis on Cuba's medical and educational brigades. It is officially portrayed as internationalist solidarity, however, the documents and testimonies presented herein expose a systematic pattern of forced labor—trafficking in persons—of the Cuban “collaborators” by the Cuban State with the acquiescence of the Government of Jamaica.

The report highlights the secrecy surrounding the bilateral agreements between Cuba and Jamaica and the lack of transparency regarding their costs and benefits to Jamaica. It describes the model of modern slavery rooted in exploitation by which a highly-qualified medical specialist working a gruelling 268 hours a month in regular shifts plus on-call duties at a public hospital in Jamaica is effectively paid just US\$3.7 an hour. Threats, arbitrary and outlandish restrictions, coupled with constant vigilance, stalinist disciplinary measures and political duties imposed by Cuban “coordinators” in Jamaican soil, effectively strip the Cuban workers of control over their wages, passports, movements, social relationships, and activities. The Jamaican population mostly ignores this, as the government and the media systematically extol Cuba's generosity, solidarity, and questionable benefits to the citizens and the country's health and educational systems.

Despite repeated public denials from Jamaica's highest authorities—including the Prime Minister—that their government is not party to the exploitation of the Cuban workers, the bilateral agreement in education, obtained through informal channels, and the testimony of the workers interviewed for this investigation coincide with the trafficking practices intrinsic to Cuba's labor export scheme in “internationalist missions” all over the world. Specific clauses of the educational agreement reveal that the government of Jamaica commits to not hire any of the Cuban specialists in Jamaica's public education system if they choose to cease providing the services under the Agreement and to secure cancellation of their work permit; in addition, it accepts that a Coordinator designated by Cuba will “coordinate, guide and oversee” the Cuban “specialists,” whose service Cuba may be terminated prematurely “as a result of disciplinary measures,” or withdrawn for “non-compliance with the rules laid down.” The same practices are reported for the medical brigade operating in Jamaica under a bilateral agreement that both governments have failed to disclose.

The investigation also describes how the Cuban mission is used to exert political influence in Jamaica. The Cuban collaborators are instructed to maintain a social media presence with content favourable to the Cuban regime and to engage in political proselytizing during elections. The educational brigade uses content favourable to the Cuban dictatorship and its revolutionary leaders for instruction in Jamaican classrooms as early as grade school. Cuba's presence in the country is also boosted by extensive propaganda and political activism by support groups coordinated from Cuba.

The report also notes that the Cuban government exports doctors, other health workers, and teachers to Jamaica despite severe personnel shortages in Cuba, which points to the commercial priority of the labor export. Finally, it describes the US government's effort to combat trafficking in persons globally, including Cuba's exported workers to Jamaica since 2021, and how Jamaican authorities have refused to acknowledge the problem or address it. Meanwhile, the US has been sending tens of millions of dollars in annual aid to Jamaica, technically funding the Cuban brigades.

Reviewing the bilateral agreements and properly assessing the situation of Cuban workers in Jamaica would confirm the exploitation scheme. The United States government, pursuant to anti-trafficking law, should sanction both Cuban and Jamaican officials who participate or are complicit in this practice, and condition aid to Jamaica to its effective cessation.

Introduction

Cuba's collaboration with Jamaica dates back to the 1970s. Since its inception, it has been based on the forced labor — human trafficking — of Cuban workers. Testimonies of several members of the Cuban brigades in Jamaica, as well as copies of agreements and other documents, confirm the scheme of exploitation imposed by the Cuban regime with the acquiescence of the Jamaican government. This coerced labor export is publicly framed as “humanitarian aid,” yet the Cuban government itself acknowledges that it represents the country's principal source of revenue.¹

To simplify the text, this report uses the terms “internationalist” or “collaborator,” the official designations used by the Cuban state to refer to its exported workforce. However, since 2010, Cuba Archive has been producing extensive evidence that these workers are, in effect, modern-day slaves subjected to conditions consistent with human trafficking. Its numerous publications on the subject are essential complements to this report.²

Historical context

Jamaica gained its independence from the United Kingdom on August 6, 1962. Six months earlier, in January, all OAS member countries except Mexico had broken relations with Cuba. The guerrilla activities of the recently established revolutionary-communist regime, along with its Marxist-Leninist government, were declared incompatible with the principles and purposes of the Inter-American System.³ In 1972, Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley (1924-1997)⁴ established

¹ See “Sector Externo” (External Sector) in the statistical series published annually by the National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) of Cuba, <https://www.onei.gob.cu/sector-externo-1>.

² See Cuba Archive's Cuba Salud project at <https://cubaarchive.org/cuba-salud/>.

³ At the Eighth Meeting of Consultation of OAS Foreign Ministers, held in Punta del Este, Uruguay in January 1962, Cuba was excluded—essentially suspended—from participating in the organization. (Final Act, Eighth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Organization of American States. Punta del Este, Uruguay, from January 22 to 31, 1962. See also “How were the armed interventions promoted by Cuba in Latin America,” *BBC*, Mar. 29, 2019.

⁴ Michael Manley served three terms as Prime Minister of Jamaica, two of them consecutive (1972–80 and 1989–92). The notorious socialist dedicated himself to instituting policies of redistribution of wealth that were disastrous for the economy. He was a strong supporter of the non-aligned movement, one of the founders of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (Caricom), and cultivated close relations with Cuba and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Far East. Manley lost the 1980 election to conservative Edward Seaga. In 1989, he was again elected prime minister, having adopted a more moderate stance favoring closer relations with the United States. He promoted free market policies and privatized numerous state-owned enterprises. In 1992, he was forced to resign due to health problems. (“Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed Jun. 29, 2025.)

diplomatic relations with Cuba⁵ and developed close ties with Fidel Castro (1926-2016). Manley was a socialist and considered Cuba “a shining example of what the peoples of the Caribbean could achieve.”⁶

In November 1975, the first session of the Cuba/Jamaica Joint Commission on Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was held in Kingston to discuss proposals for collaboration. After a week of meetings, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed to establish the areas of cooperation and exchange for the following twelve months. Both governments needed to ratify the projects that would be implemented. The agreement covered key sectors such as fishing, agriculture, the sugar industry, tourism, commerce, construction, health, and maritime transport.⁷ Cuba committed to building and equipping a secondary school in Jamaica with a capacity for 500 boarding students. Additionally, it agreed to lead the construction of several micro-dams in Jamaica, supply a mechanical sugarcane harvester, and send a prefabrication plant capable of producing 400 homes annually. 44 agricultural research projects were identified and there were plans to initiate bilateral trade and provide technical assistance in health. The agreement also aimed to revitalize Cuba's tourism industry with assistance from Jamaica and to utilize the port of Newport West in Jamaica for the transshipment of cargo to and from Cuba. It is unknown how many projects were ultimately ratified or completed.



Fidel Castro and Michael Manley. Cropped from photo by José Oller, Granma.cu.

Manley's administration proved disastrous and left the economy in ruins: Jamaica's GDP plummeted by 20% and the country was gripped by escalating political violence.⁸ In this climate of crisis and disillusionment, voters overwhelmingly rejected the ruling party. In October 1980, the staunchly anti-communist and pro-Western Edward Seaga, leader of the Jamaica Labour Party, won a sweeping electoral victory.

⁵ “PNP thanks the Government and People of Cuba for supporting Jamaica,” Cuba Minrex, Mar. 29, 2020; “Senate President Highlights Friendship Between Jamaica and Cuba,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Feb. 3, 2020.

⁶ “The ‘sword’ of friendship that hurt Manley,” *The Gleaner*, Jul. 9, 2021.

⁷ “Jamaica-Cuba accord signed,” *The Gleaner*, Nov. 17, 1975; Michael Massing, “The Jamaica Experiment,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1983. 453. Telegram 2743 from the Embassy in Jamaica to the Department of State, Office of the Historian, US Department of State, Jul. 27, 1975.

⁸ M. Massing, op. cit.

One of Seaga's first acts as Prime Minister was to expel the Cuban ambassador, Ulises Estrada, accusing him of interfering in Jamaica's internal affairs.⁹ Tensions escalated further in October 1981, when Cuba refused to extradite three Jamaican fugitives. In response, Seaga severed diplomatic ties, suspended all collaboration programs, and repatriated Cuban personnel.¹⁰ He remained in office until 1989, when Michael Manley —now embracing a more moderate, market-oriented platform— was re-elected. In 1990, Manley restored diplomatic relations and resumed bilateral cooperation with Cuba.

The Cuban Medical Brigade in Jamaica

History of the Cuban medical brigades in Jamaica

Cuban health personnel first arrived in Jamaica in 1976, with 14 doctors and nurses went to work at the Savanna-la-Mar Public General Hospital.¹¹ During the 1980s, bilateral “collaboration” was effectively put on hold. When ties were restored in the 1990s, Cuban cooperation resumed, but the exact number of Cuban personnel sent to Jamaica during that period is unknown.

In 2004, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez launched Operation Miracle (“Operación Milagro”), a Venezuela-funded initiative that deployed Cuban health professionals to perform free eye surgeries across the region.¹² The program expanded to several countries in the region and was renamed Mission Miracle (“Misión Milagro”). From 2005 to 2010, 5,905 patients travelled from Jamaica to Cuba for surgery.¹³ This paved the way for the first bilateral agreement to establish the “Jamaica/Cuba Eye Care Program,” signed on July 28, 2009. In January 2010, an Ophthalmology Center was opened in Jamaica. According to the government, the National Health Fund of Jamaica has allocated a total of US\$80.4 million for the program.¹⁴

⁹ Carl Wint, “Jamaica severs ties with Cuba, moves closer to Washington,” Kingston, *UPI*, Oct. 30, 1981.

¹⁰ Anthony Brown, George Flash and Michael Anderson were charged with murder and bank robbery (Ibid.); M. Massing, op. cit.

¹¹ Anthony Lewis, “Cuba marks 60 years of medical mission —47 years service to Jamaica,” *Savanna-La-Mar, Jamaica Observer*, May 28, 2023.

¹² Mission Miracle began in 2004 with funding from Venezuela for Cuban doctors and technicians to perform eye operations at no cost to low-income patients. It exists in the context of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), created by Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez, which seeks the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean. The initial agreement called for many Venezuelans to be operated in Cuba, but the project quickly expanded to more countries. By 2017, 69 eye centers had been established in 15 countries. (“Misión Milagro,” https://www.ecured.cu/Misi%C3%B3n_Milagro; Wikipedia quoting Helen Yaffe, “Cuban medical internationalism: an army of white coats,” *We Are Cuba!: How a Revolutionary People Have Survived in a Post-Soviet World*, 147–74, Yale University Press, 2020.)

¹³ Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Cuba's Collaboration in the Caribbean. Washington, D.C.: PAHO/WHO Representation of Cuba, 2011.

¹⁴ “NHF provides J\$48 million for Phase 2 of Jamaica Cuba Eye Care Project,” National Health Fund, Government of Jamaica.

The arrival of the ophthalmological brigade enabled Cuba to expand its presence in Jamaica through additional health and educational brigades, eventually establishing a nationwide footprint. However, determining the exact number of personnel at any given time is challenging, as the reported totals often include workers who are in the process of being rotated or replaced.

According to Cuba's official media, in mid-2018, the Cuban medical brigade in Jamaica had 243 members who were working in the country's 13 parishes, including doctors, nurses, medical engineers, and healthcare technicians.¹⁵ In June 2019, the Jamaican Ministry of Health confirmed that there were around 300 Cuban health professionals throughout the country and that 344 more would be "processed": 212 nurses, 108 doctors, and 24 technicians. Authorities also aimed to qualify an additional 30 doctors and 9 technicians who were undergoing English language training at the time.¹⁶ However, in August 2019, Cuba's Prensa Latina news agency¹⁷ reported that only 290 would join the 259 Cubans already in Jamaica, 18 of whom were part of the ophthalmological brigade.



*The Cuban medical brigade leaves for Jamaica to assist with the pandemic, March 2020.
(Photo: ACN, Cuban News Agency).*

On January 30th, 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the COVID-19 outbreak was a public health emergency of international concern.¹⁸ On February 28, 2020, Jamaica and Cuba announced the renewal of their health cooperation agreement

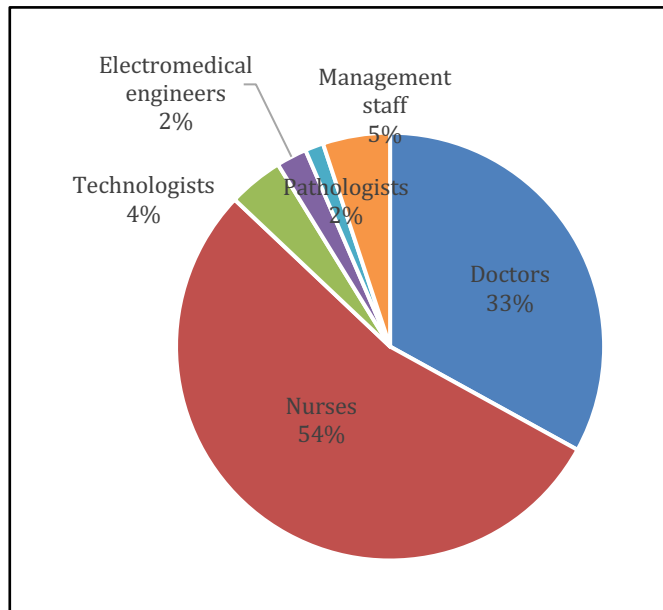
¹⁵ Leticia Martínez Hernández, "Es enaltecedor y reconfortante compartir con ustedes," *Granma*, Jul. 6, 2018.

¹⁶ HG Helps, "Cuban medical personnel to ease burden in Jamaica's primary health care system," *Jamaica Observer*, Jun. 23, 2019.

¹⁷ "Jamaica contará con más colaboradores cubanos de la Salud," *Prensa Latina*, Aug. 6, 2019.

¹⁸ "COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) Global research and innovation forum," Organización Mundial de la Salud, Feb. 12, 2020.

for an additional three years.¹⁹ On March 11, the WHO declared the pandemic.²⁰ Just ten days later, a Cuban medical brigade of 140 members arrived in Jamaica to combat the new coronavirus: 46 doctors, 98 nurses, and 4 technicians.²¹ They belonged to the Henry Reeve International Medical Contingent, officially portrayed as a specialized corps of doctors trained for disaster response and severe epidemics.²² Several former members of these brigades have reported receiving no specialized training other than brief general guidelines—or, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, a short course lasting only a few days while awaiting deployment.



In mid-March 2020, Jamaica had barely registered its first death from the new virus and had only counted 16 positive cases,²³ an incidence rate significantly lower than Cuba's, which had already reported 1,035 infected and 34 deaths.²⁴ Yet, Jamaica was one of the first ten countries that received Cuban doctors to combat COVID-19.²⁵ At the flag bestowal ceremony of the brigade leaving for Jamaica at Havana's Central Unit of Medical Cooperation (UCCM),²⁶ its head coordinator, Dr. Eduardo Roperó Poveda, stressed that "going to provide help to that sister Caribbean country constitutes a commitment and a legitimate pride, it is a modest tribute to Commander

in Chief Fidel Castro, father of Cuba's medical collaboration."²⁷

¹⁹ "Jamaica y Cuba firman nuevo Acuerdo de Cooperación en materia de salud," *Cuba Debate*, Feb. 28, 2020.

²⁰ "WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19," World Health Organization, Mar. 11, 2020.

²¹ HG Helps, Editor-at-Large, "Ready to heal JA," *Jamaica Observer*, Apr. 5, 2020. (78 of the members of the emergency brigade had already served in previous missions, 97 (70%) were women, and the average age was 48.)

²² In September 2005, Fidel Castro offered aid to the United States after Hurricane Katrina, which was not accepted, and to Cuba's emergency brigades "Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics," or "Henry Reeve Brigades." Henry Reeve was a citizen of New York who fought with the Cubans in the first war of independence from Spain (1868-1878). ("Henry Reeve Mission," FidelCastro.cu.)

²³ "Jamaica records first COVID-19 death," Ministry of Health and Wellness, Mar. 19, 2020.

²⁴ See "Exportación de servicios médicos cubanos en tiempos de COVID-19," NoSomosDesertores.com, Apr. 20, 2020.

²⁵ Along with Venezuela, Nicaragua, Suriname, Haiti, Belize, Saint Lucia, Honduras, Angola and Togo.

²⁶ The UCCM is on the campus of the CUJAE University (José Antonio Echeverría Technological University) of Havana.

²⁷ "Brigada médica cubana parte a Jamaica para combatir el Covid-19," *Granma*, Mar. 21, 2020. (Translation from Spanish.)

In September 2020, *Prensa Latina* reported that the Cuban medical brigade in Jamaica had 433 professionals: 143 doctors, 234 nursing graduates, 6 pathologists, 18 technologists, 10 electromedical engineers, and the rest, management staff²⁸ (this means that at least 22, or 5%, were not medical personnel). Later, in 2021, it was reported that more than 250 Cuban health professionals had been sent to Jamaica during the pandemic.²⁹ The reason for this discrepancy in the numbers is unknown, but it is systematic and encompasses all areas, including Cuba's medical diplomacy.³⁰

As reported in countries such as Kenya,³¹ South Africa,³² and Angola,³³ complaints surfaced during the pandemic that the Jamaican government brought in Cuban doctors while local doctors were unemployed. Jamaican doctors told local media that they had been laid off because the government couldn't afford to pay them due to the healthcare crisis. They questioned how, given those circumstances, it was possible to bring in Cuban doctors instead.³⁴

In May 2022, Jamaica's Ministry of Health and Welfare signed a letter of intent for "a technical cooperation agreement" with the government of Cuba for a continuous medical brigade, and renewed the accord to continue operating the Ophthalmology Center.³⁵ In May 2023, the Jamaican press reported that more than 300 doctors, nurses, dentists, technologists, and biomedical engineers were serving in Jamaican hospitals and clinics as part of the Cuban medical brigade, while the Jamaican government reported that 17 Cuban doctors were part of the ophthalmology mission: 9 were appointed to the Kingston Public Hospital, with the rest serving at Saint Joseph's Hospital in Saint Andrew Parish.³⁶

In March 2025, Jamaica's foreign minister said at a press conference that there were more than 400 Cuban doctors, nurses, biomedical engineers, and technicians in Jamaica.³⁷ It is currently the

²⁸ "Cuban doctors provide over 225,000 consultations in Jamaica," *La Habana, Prensa Latina*, Sep. 12, 2020.

²⁹ A. Lewis, op. cit.

³⁰ See, for example, "Validating Problematic Data," p. 17, and "Obfuscated Reports," p. 27, in Maria C. Werlau, *The Pan American Health Organization and Cuba: A Controversial Collaboration*, Washington, D.C., Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, Oct. 27, 2022.

³¹ Verah Okeyo, "Kenya: Revealed - Secrets of the Kenya-Cuba Doctors Deal," Nairobi, *Daily Nation*, Oct. 1, 2020; "KMPDU now wants Cuban doctors deal made public," *The Star*, Nov. 15, 2022.

³² In South Africa, a Cuban brigade of 187 health professionals during the pandemic (May 2020-May 2021) cost only US\$7,060 per month per worker in salaries, none of them were specialists, while 500 qualified South African doctors could not find employment. (Azarrah Karrim, "South Africa spent at least R400m on Cuban Medical Brigade deployment," *News 24*, Apr. 29, 2020; "R239m - That's how much taxpayers will cough up for Cuban doctors," *IOL News*, Jun 9, 2020; Jackie Cameron, "Herman Mashaba: Finding jobs for thousands of unemployed doctors, nurses, as hospitals creak at seams," *BigzNews*, Jan. 20, 2021.)

³³ "Angola speaks only - the coming of Cuban doctors 'is a business'," *VOA*, Jun. 12, 2020.

³⁴ Corey Robinson, "No work for doctors amid public health crisis - hospitals reportedly not employing medical professionals due to budgetary constraints caused by COVID-19," *The Gleaner*, Jul. 12, 2020.

³⁵ "Jamaica, Cuba to renew technical cooperation agreements," *Loop News*, Oct. 22, 2022.

³⁶ "También los oftalmólogos cubanos se van a Jamaica, detrás de médicos y maestros," Kingston, *Diario de Cuba*, Nov. 27, 2023.

³⁷ Bert Wilkinson, "Caribbean leaders oppose US policy targeting Cuban medical missions, saying they're critical," Georgetown, Guyana, *Associated Press*, Mar. 11, 2025.

fourth largest Cuban medical brigade in Latin America and the Caribbean, following those of Venezuela, Mexico, and Guatemala.³⁸ In April 2025, the director of the Central Medical Cooperation Unit, Michael Cabrera, said that over 24,500 Cuban professionals were providing services in 56 countries;³⁹ this represents a 62% decline from a reported peak of around 48,270 health professionals in 2014.⁴⁰

Several sources have reported to Cuba Archive that the current head of Cuba's medical brigade in Jamaica is Katia Ochoa Aguilera and that she replaced José Arronte Villamarín.

Reported results

As of May 2019, it was reported that Cuban medical brigades in Jamaica had treated 1,447,015 patients, performed 30,761 surgeries, and applied 7,331 vaccine doses.⁴¹ In 2022, the Ministry of Health and Wellness reported that from 2010 to 2019, Cuba's ophthalmology program in Jamaica had saved at least 17,000 people from blindness and examined 35,000 patients (8,491 undergoing laser therapy for diabetic retinopathy, 8,837 undergoing cataract surgeries, and 4,084 undergoing pterygium surgeries).⁴² In February 2024, the authorities of both countries highlighted the ophthalmology program's results, which restarted at the end of 2023 after its interruption during the pandemic.⁴³ The Minister of Health, Christopher Tufton, said he was "very happy with this collaboration." Since the program resumed, 1,230 individuals had reportedly regained their sight and 5,847 consultations had been conducted, averaging over 100 patients seen per day, including 20 surgeries.⁴⁴ In October 2024 it was reported that, since September 2023, 22 professionals —17 Cubans and 5 Jamaicans— had performed 3,476 surgeries within the framework of the Jamaica-Cuba Eye Care Program.⁴⁵ This would equal 13.8 surgeries per day for the 251 working days of the year.

³⁸ "Cuban Medical Brigades: Number of workers, 2008 and 2025," Cuba Archive.

³⁹ "Historias de humanismo y solidaridad de la colaboración médica," Canal Caribe / YouTube, Mar. 29, 2025.

⁴⁰ "A propósito de Cuba y la colaboración internacional (I)," *Cubadebate*, Sep. 11, 2014. (UCCM Director Michael Cabrera is quoted. In 2014, 64,362 Cuban specialists were reported working in 91 countries, of whom 48,270 were health workers.)

⁴¹ "Jamaica contará con más colaboradores cubanos de la salud," op. cit.

⁴² *Cuba's collaboration in the Caribbean*, Organización Panamericana de la Salud. Washington, D.C., PAHO/WHO Representation of Cuba, 2011; "Jamaica, Cuba to renew technical cooperation agreements," Ministry of Health and Wellness," Oct. 22, 2022. Also see "Jamaica reanudó programa oftalmológico," *Granma*, Nov. 27, 2023.

⁴³ "Jamaica and Cuba highlight results of joint ophthalmological program," Kingston, *Prensa Latina*, 7 de febrero de 2024.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Natalie Campbell, "Over 3000 surgeries done under Jamaica Cuba Eye Care Programme since September 2023, *IRIE FM*, Oct. 29, 2024



Images of the Camilo Cienfuegos Provincial Hospital in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba. José Castro's Facebook, April 7, 2020.

It is striking that neither of the two governments or PAHO mention the severe public health crisis in Cuba and the serious deficit there of health personnel, particularly doctors and specialists. The latest edition of the Statistical Yearbook of Health, published by Cuba's National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), reports 80,763 doctors in 2023, the last year reported. This was 13,303 fewer doctors than in 2022 and 12,065 fewer than in 2021. The 14,532 dentists reported were 3,125 fewer than in 2022 and 3,246 fewer than in 2021; the 73,284 nurses were 6,285 fewer than in 2022 and 7,414 fewer than in 2021.⁴⁶ ONEI does not

specify if the doctors and other health workers deployed overseas are included in this total; presumably they are, as they remain on the Ministry of Health's pay-roll and receive their usual salaries in Cuban pesos. This would allow the government to inflate the numbers of medical personnel by including those in internationalist service. The number of doctors, nurses, and other health workers are not itemized when Cuba reports on the numbers for the medical brigades.

All that glitters is not gold

Cuba Archive does not have the Cuba-Jamaica agreement that governs medical collaboration. However, it has a copy of the "contract for the provision of professional services" that a doctor, Anonymous Source No. 1, had to sign in 2018 with the Cuban State before leaving on a 3-year mission to Jamaica. It highlights the exploitation intrinsic to the export of Cuban workers by the Cuban State.

⁴⁶ See more on this in "Human Resources for Health," pp. 85-94, in M. Werlau, *The Pan American Health Organization and Cuba*, op. cit.

The doctor, who now lives outside of Cuba, shared his copy of the document, that he made by taking photos of each page with his phone.⁴⁷ He provided his testimony to Cuba Archive on the condition that it be published anonymously for fear of reprisals against his family on the Island.⁴⁸ He relates that—as corroborated by members of other missions, including another doctor who was in Jamaica from 2021 to 2024, Anonymous Source No. 2⁴⁹—before their contingent left for Jamaica, they congregated them at the UCCM, “in a mad dash,” and did not even let them read the contract they had to sign. There was no possibility of legal advice or negotiation of the terms. Both doctors who were in Jamaica had served on previous international missions and explained that everyone always quickly signs anything they are given because they have no choice if they want to be part of an internationalist mission. Doctor No. 2 remarked that nobody asks about anything, to avoid being marked and lose the opportunity. He began to take photos of the contract with his phone but was forced to delete them. Both doctors were also required to sign the “Disciplinary Regulations for Cooperators Who Provide Services Abroad,”⁵⁰ and Doctor No. 1 also had to sign an affidavit of what the internationalists could import, a copy of which he preserved.⁵¹

2.3.- Acorde a los principios de la ética médica cubana, no podrá realizarse el ejercicio de la medicina privada.
 2.4.- Reconocer que el Representante designado por el MINSAP tiene facultades amplias y suficientes para actuar en nombre de EL CONTRATADO, como su representante legal ante las autoridades de Jamaica.
 2.5.- Liberar a la UCCM de toda responsabilidad de pago por las obligaciones financieras que el mismo tenga en la República de Cuba, durante el cumplimiento del presente contrato de servicios.
 2.6.- Viajar a Jamaica al inicio de la contratación y regresar a CUBA al término de la misma, así como para el disfrute de sus vacaciones utilizando la vía y línea aérea acordada entre ambos gobiernos.
 2.7.- Asumir todos los gastos que se determinen por las autoridades competentes de Jamaica por cualquier tipo de contravención de las leyes vigentes de las cuales sean responsables.
 2.8.- Presentar con 30 días de antelación al vencimiento de la fecha de visa de trabajo a las autoridades migratorias de Jamaica.
 2.9.- Pagar las multas establecidas en caso de no presentar la visa de trabajo a tiempo, para su actualización, en correspondencia con lo establecido por las leyes migratorias de Jamaica..
 2.10.- Entregar a su llegada a Jamaica al Jefe de la Misión Médica Cubana el pasaporte para que el mismo se encargue de realizar los trámites migratorios correspondientes así como será responsable de su custodia entregándoselo al colaborador solo ante actos jurídicos que justifiquen dicha entrega.

Excerpt from the doctor's contract with the UCCM, Anonymous Source No. 1.

⁴⁷ The document was sent to Cuba Archive by email in poor quality photographs on April 18, 2025. See “Contract between the Cuban health worker in Jamaica and the Cuban government’s hiring entity (in Spanish)” [Cuba Archive](#).

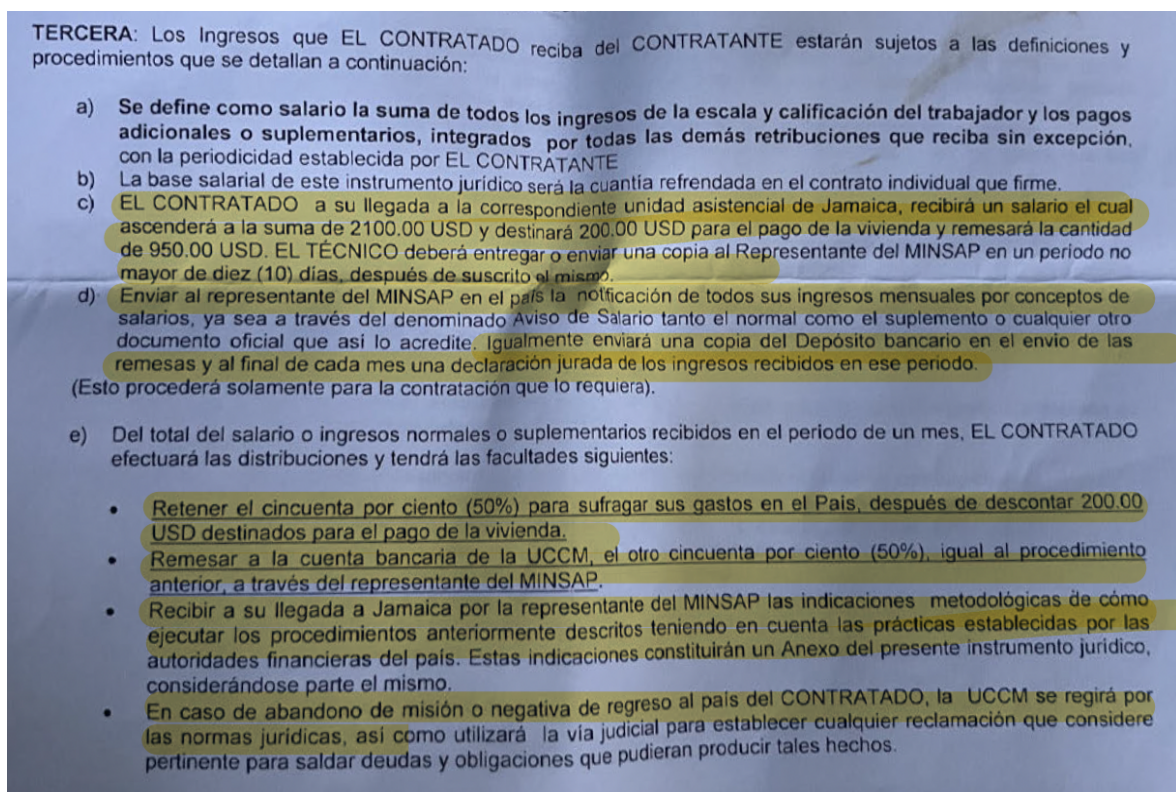
⁴⁸ Anonymous Source No. 1, emails from a Cuban doctor addressed to Maria Werlau, from April to June 2025 and telephone interview with Maria Werlau, July 1, 2024. The doctor's identity is being kept confidential for fear of reprisals from the Cuban government.

⁴⁹ Anonymous Source No. 2, medical specialist, in a telephone interview with Maria Werlau, July 8, 2024, and correspondence by text message, July 9, 2025. The identity of this doctor is being kept confidential for fear of reprisals from the Cuban government.

⁵⁰ “Reglamento disciplinario para los cooperantes que prestan servicios en el exterior,” under Resolution 368 of 2020 of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment (MINCEX) of Cuba.

⁵¹ “Declaración jurada de los ingresos mensuales recibidos por un médico cubano en la misión de Jamaica,” [Cuba Archive](#).

The aforementioned Regulation forces all workers exported by the Cuban government and all Cubans who travel abroad on official missions to subordinate themselves to Cuban supervisors; it includes numerous arbitrary restrictions, such as the forced return to Cuba after performing the assigned duties and on the date and transportation indicated, and forbids driving any means of transportation without authorization, failing to comply with the imposed location system, associating with anyone who does not support revolutionary ideals, having relationships with or marrying locals without informing supervisors, and speaking to the media without informing supervisors. The Regulations establish a detailed disciplinary framework with consequences of escalating severity. Sanctions include: (a) public reprimand; (b) fines of up to 25% of the salary in national currency for up to six months; (c) loss of remuneration; (d) reassignment to a position with inferior working conditions; (e) transfer to another locality under worse conditions; (f) demotion from a higher rank position; (g) revocation of the mission; and h) expulsion from the mission. The listed penalties notably include the loss of remuneration.



Extract from the contract with the UCCM of the doctor Anonymous Source No. 1.

The individual contract examined outlines the provision of professional services between the doctor (the “contractor” or “contracted party”) and the Central Medical Cooperation Unit (the “contracting party”), of the Ministry of Health in Cuba, MINSAP, represented by its Deputy Director, Dr. Rolando Piloto Tome. The following clauses stand out—they make the worker commit to:

1. not practicing private medicine in Jamaica;

2. granting the MINSAP representative broad powers to act on his/her behalf and as his/her legal representative in Jamaica;
3. travel back to Cuba at the end of the contract and during vacation periods, as well as on the designated airline;
4. surrender his/her passport to the Chief of the Cuban Medical Mission upon arrival in Jamaica;
5. receive a salary of US\$2,100, keep US\$200 for housing, and remit 50% of the balance (US\$950) to the UCCM's bank account;
6. submit to the MINSAP representative on a monthly basis, a copy of the income receipts (paid by Jamaica) within ten days of receiving the salary, a sworn statement to confirm it, and proof of the bank deposit of the remitted funds;
7. receive 100% of their fixed salary in Cuba (which was, at the time, 1,390 Cuban pesos per month, which was less than US\$50 in 2018 and today is less than US\$4);
8. comply with disciplinary processes (which the document does not clarify but, are understood as part of the Regulation for collaborators).

As in other missions in the Caribbean, the collaborators must also remit to the Cuban government 50% of the payment for additional hours worked. According to testimonies collected by Cuba Archive and Annarela Grimal, co-author of this report, for a piece published last April by CubaNet,⁵² the hospital pays this additional compensation in Jamaican dollars directly to each Cuban doctor into accounts in their name at NCB Bank (National Commercial Bank Jamaica Limited). The same is done with the members of Cuba's educational mission, as we will see later. After receiving the monthly payment, each member of the mission gets an "instruction" from the brigade chief informing them of the amount to be "remitted" (transferred) to the "Cuban Medical Brigade" account in the same bank. The exact amount depends on the exchange rate with the dollar and is about half of the monthly salary paid by Jamaica. According to official documents leaked to Grimal, the Cuban mission uses an arbitrary exchange rate of 154 Cuban pesos (CUP) per US dollar,⁵³ which effectively confiscates additional wages, as the market rate is more than double.⁵⁴

Doctor No. 1 described the conditions the collaborators face as "cruel." He joined the mission hoping to escape poverty despite being a practicing physician, and to support his family. According to him, Jamaica typically sends a delegation to Cuba to interview candidates selected by Cuban authorities at the UCCM. Over the course of a week, they review credentials and administer basic oral and written tests involving clinical scenarios where applicants must provide a diagnosis and treatment plan. Those who pass are selected for the brigade and employment contracts and visas are issued. However, the system is not fool proof—he recalled one case in which a so-called doctor who "was

⁵² Annarela Grimal, "Trafficking of doctors in the Caribbean: The story of five Cuban Women," *CubaNet*, Apr. 16, 2025.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴ See "Tasa representativa del mercado informal de divisa," *eltoque.com*.

an alcoholic and knew nothing about medicine,” was removed at Jamaica’s request after repeated complaints.

Upon arriving in Jamaica at the end of 2018, Dr. No. 1 was sent to a region of the country outside the capital. His testimony coincides with that of another doctor interviewed by Cuba Archive and of the two health workers interviewed by Grimal. The head of mission kept his official, red, passport, which was only valid for travel for the assigned mission.⁵⁵ In addition to having to transfer to Cuba about 50 percent of what they received from the Jamaican government for their services, all collaborators were also required to “remit” what they received in direct payment for additional hours of work, any payments received for transportation to other locales to provide medical services, and any “incentives” paid by Jamaica from time to time. The member of the mission known as the “economist” pressured them to obtain the original receipts (“payslips”) of payments they received directly, since she argued that copies could be altered. Nurses who were part of the mission and teaching at the University of the West Indies were forced to retroactively remit part of their earnings after the mission chief discovered they were receiving a higher salary. They were told the deductions were mandatory to help provide powdered milk and cytostatics (chemotherapy) for Cuba’s children.

DECIMA SEGUNDA: Ambas partes se reservan el derecho de modificar o rescindir el presente contrato cuando:

- EL PROFESIONAL que viole las obligaciones contraídas en el presente contrato, que motive su regreso definitivo a la patria, amparado por los procedimientos disciplinarios, establecidos para dichos casos, quedando obligado a resarcir los gastos ocasionados a la parte cubana, por ser responsable de garantizar el relevo de acuerdo a los términos de convenio Inter-institucional.

Extract from the contract with the UCCM of the doctor Anonymous Source No. 1.

For the first few months, Dr. No. 1 lived with other mission members, but later moved out to gain privacy and independence. Although the housing allowance wasn’t sufficient, living alone allowed him to earn extra income by working part-time privately —something prohibited by the Cuban authorities, who never found out. He quickly realized that the Jamaican government — including the immigration services— maintain a close relationship with Cuba, and that much of the population holds an idealized view of Cuba, Cubans, and Fidel Castro. When their local colleagues went on strike to demand better wages and conditions, they accepted that the Cubans were ordered to continue working

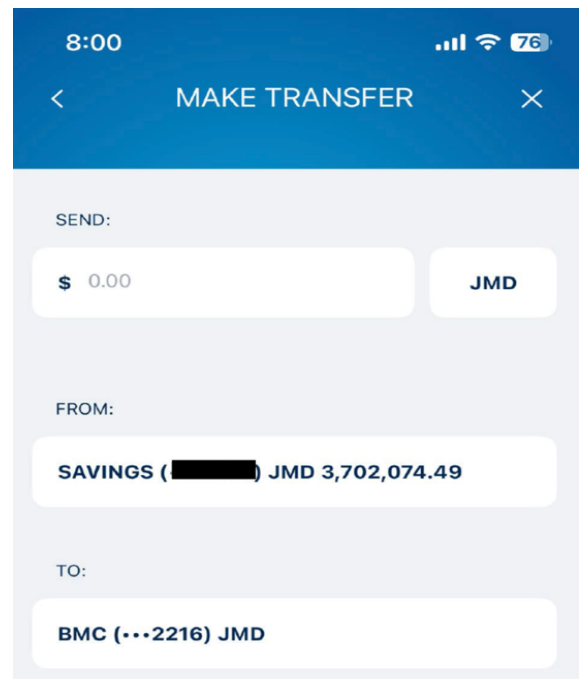
⁵⁵ In most missions, Cuban collaborators are issued “official,” red, passports, for travel tied to their assigned mission. The standard blue passports may be used for personal travel anywhere, but are generally not issued to collaborators. Some collaborators who abandoned their missions have reported to Cuba Archive that the Cuban embassy demanded that local authorities invalidate and retain their red passports, which they did. Without passports, these “deserters” are left stranded, unable to move freely, open bank accounts, and apply for visas, among many other things.

According to Doctor No. 1, the collaborators in his region felt abandoned. They received no support from the Cuban embassy or mission officials if they became ill or faced any needs. They had no medical or dental insurance, and if they got sick, were left without medical care or medication. When a colleague developed a serious condition and needed diagnostic tests, the mission chief told them to ask Jamaican colleagues for help —otherwise, the doctor would have to pay out of her own pocket. They also had no public liability insurance. When they raised concerns about legal risk, they were simply told: “No one’s going to sue you here.”

Several “desertions” occurred during his time in Jamaica, and he later learned that more had occurred after his return to Cuba. Some of those doctors remained in Jamaica for a time but were unable to work legally, eventually making their way to the United States. After a colleague defected, the head of mission and the husband of Cuba’s ambassador, Inés Fors Fernández, threatened and humiliated them.

Doctor No. 1 completed his three-year mission and returned to Cuba. He had previously served in Venezuela—a posting that, he confirmed, is practically a prerequisite for selection to other international medical missions. He recalls that conditions in Venezuela were far worse, with stricter surveillance and the systemic falsification of statistics and discarding of medical supplies and medications to justify an inflated number of patients and procedures. In Jamaica, he was not required to engage in such practices, but became acutely aware of the shortcomings of his medical training. He provided details that are withheld here to protect his identity. He later emigrated legally and now works privately in another country, where he has continued his studies and advanced professionally.

He also confirmed that the collaborators are used as instruments of propaganda. For example, he cited the visit of Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel in July 2018,⁵⁶ a few months before his own arrival in Jamaica. He was told that, to make things worse, the collaborators selected to be photographed with Díaz-Canel had their phones confiscated beforehand.



Screenshot of a doctor's mobile phone before making the monthly transfer from his account to that of the Cuban Medical Brigade (BMC).

⁵⁶ L. Martínez Hernández, op. cit.

Anonymous Source No. 2, another doctor, started his three-year mission in Jamaica in 2021. He was assigned to a hospital in the St. Thomas region as part of a brigade of around twenty that included twelve doctors. He never received a contract or official document to sign from Jamaica's Ministry of Health. He confirmed that the Jamaican government usually interviews candidates in Cuba to assess their English proficiency and has specialists ask basic medical questions related to the candidates' field. During the pandemic, the interviews were conducted by videoconference. He noted that Cuban supervisors sometimes "sneak in" friends or other favored people with inadequate training, occasionally leading Jamaican authorities to request their removal. In his view, medical training in Cuba has declined significantly since 2007, when teaching by computer was adopted.




Cuban President Miguel Díaz Canel with Cuban collaborators "who provide solidarity aid in Jamaica." (Photo: Estudios Revolución, Granma.)


When he arrived in Jamaica, the head of the brigade confiscated his passport. He was only allowed to carry it on two occasions: to open a bank account at the National Commercial Bank (NCB)⁵⁷ and to travel to and from Cuba for his annual vacation of approximately 30 days. Several brigade chiefs, he noted the irony, did have free use of passports —for their own children, whose emigration to the US they arranged from Jamaica.

Although his contract said how he would be paid, he did not have time to read it properly and does not remember the stated amount of compensation. He received his salary in Cuba in Cuban pesos deposited on a card, which he left with his mother; it was around 5,100 CUP a month, which today is less than US\$15, in those days somewhat more. In Jamaica, he normally worked eight hours a day from Monday to Friday, but he was not paid for that, as "that was between the two

⁵⁷ Anonymous Source No. 2 reports that he had learned that the bank accounts of the collaborators and the Cuban embassy in Jamaica were in Scotiabank, but had been closed for unknown reasons at the end of 2019 or the beginning of 2020, for reasons he ignores. They were moved to the NCB.

governments.” He never knew how much Jamaica paid for his daily work. He was only paid for his overtime hours on-call duties —“sessions”— which he would undertake from around 4 pm until dawn in order to make some money.

 **SOUTH EAST REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY**
SUMMARY OF MONTHLY PAID EMPLOYEES' CLAIM

FACILITY: Princess Margaret Hospital 

Name: [REDACTED] Post/Classification: MO II Period: June 2023

Address: 54 Lysons Road Morant Bay Normal Shift: 8 AM - 4 PM Duty Roster #: _____

Place a tick mark ☒ in the box below the allowance(s) being claimed

Date	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	Meal/Supper/Ref-h.	Taxi	Hospital Resp.	Supervisory	Premium	Standby/On Call	Sessions	Remarks

Excerpt from the record for June 2023 in which the doctor Anonymous Source #2 reported his on-call shifts.

Like Doctor No. 1, he was paid in Jamaican dollars directly into his bank account, but was required to “remit” a portion of his earnings into the account of the Cuban Medical Brigade, as instructed by his Cuban supervisor. He had to submit his original hospital-issued payslip to the brigade chief and was only allowed to retain US\$800 to \$1,000 monthly. He reports working eight on-call duty shifts of 12 hours each month (totalling 96 hours), added to the standard 40-hour workweek, which multiplied by 4.3 weeks per month, totalled 268 hours worked per month, for an effective wage, in the best case, of US\$3.72 an hour when he could keep US\$1,000.

BRIGADA MEDICA CUBANA EN JAMAICA. DECLARACION JURADA

Según contrato firmado por usted se establece que debe firmar y enviar mensualmente a la dirección BMC la declaración jurada de sus ingresos por los diferentes conceptos.

Yo [REDACTED] Brigada St. Thomas

Declaro No ☐ Si ☒ haber percibido durante el mes los siguientes ingresos:

Mes a que corresponde la Remesa	Total Remesado	Conceptos de la Remesa
<u>Junio 2023</u>	<u>327578.69</u>	<u>Sessions</u>
<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>	<u>/</u>

Fecha 28/6/23 Firma [REDACTED]

Copy of a sworn statement for June 2023 signed by a doctor, Anonymous Source No. 1.

Doctor No. 2 kept copies of the monthly sworn statement he had to submit to the head of the mission reporting his monthly earnings; it states: “According to the contract signed by you, it is established that you must sign and send monthly to the CMB management the affidavit of your income for the different sessions.” (Doctor No. 1 and the two members of the medical brigade interviewed by Grimal confirm they too had to provide the monthly sworn statement.) Doctor No. 2 regularly received the equivalent of US\$200 in Jamaican dollars into his account as a housing allowance, which he had to withdraw and hand over in cash to the brigade leader. He lived in a brigade house with 18 colleagues, in severely overcrowded conditions, sharing only two bathrooms and a single kitchen. US\$200 a month is altogether insufficient to find a suitable rental in Jamaica.⁵⁸

After the pandemic, prices had risen significantly, and his wages were just not enough. He had to pay for his food and all personal expenses—including phone, internet, and transportation—and had to send money to his family in Cuba. In this context, a doctor member of the brigade who asked the brigade chief during a group meeting when they could expect compensation and living conditions to improve was removed from his position and scheduled to be sent back to Cuba. He managed to escape and secured refuge in a third country. The brigade chief was reprimanded and sent back to Cuba as punishment for the doctor’s “desertion.”

BRIGADA MEDICA CUBANA EN JAMAICA							
CALCULO SALARIO PAGAR COLABORADORES ATC MES TRABAJADO FEBRERO/2022							
ESPECIALIDAD		Tiempo trabajado	tasa x dia	Salario Devengado	Tasa de Cambio	Al cambio en JMD	A COBRAR
ENFERMEROS REGISTRADOS		20	70.00000000	1400.00	155.6029	217,844.06	124,482.32
ENFERMERO [REDACTED] (12/09/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS VACACIONES [REDACTED] (19/11/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS VACACIONES [REDACTED] (16/12/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (20/12/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (20/12/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS VACACIONES (26/12/2021 AL 4/02/2022) DIAS TRABAJAD		16	70.00000000	1120.00	155.6029	174,275.25	102,697.91
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (27/12/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (27/12/2021 AL 25/2/2022) DIAS TRABAJAD		1	70.00000000	70.00	155.6029	10,892.20	21,006.39
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (27/12/2021 AL ?) NO HA REGRESADO		0					
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (27/12/2021 AL 4/2/2022) DIAS TRABAJAD		16	70.00000000	1120.00	155.6029	174,275.25	102,697.91
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (27/12/2021 AL 4/2/2022) DIAS TRABAJAD		16	70.00000000	1120.00	155.6029	174,275.25	102,697.91
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (4/01/2022 AL 4/02/2022) DIAS TRABAJAD		16	70.00000000	1120.00	155.6029	174,275.25	102,697.91
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (14/01/2022 AL ?) DIAS VACAC		6	70.00000000	420.00	155.6029	65,353.22	48,236.90
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (4/02/2022 AL ?) DIAS TRABAJAD		3	70.00000000	210.00	155.6029	32,676.61	31,898.59
ENFERMEROS [REDACTED] (4/02/2022 AL ?) DIAS VACACIO		5	70.00000000	350.00	155.6029	54,461.02	27,230.51
MEDICOS		20	105.00000000	2100.00	155.6029	326,766.09	178,943.34

Extract from the February 2022 payroll of the Cuban medical brigade in Jamaica. courtesy of Annarela Grimal.

The contract by the UCCM with the collaborator establishes that, in the case of a doctor, “the collaborator will receive a salary of US\$2,100 and will allocate US\$200 to housing and remit the amount of US\$950” (equivalent to 50% of the net salary, US\$1,900, less the US\$200 for housing).

⁵⁸ The average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in, Kingston, is equivalent to US \$571 to \$703 and \$323 to \$372 outside the capital. (See Numbeo and Wise.)

However, the actual payroll for February 2022 (see below), provided to Grimal,⁵⁹ shows that the US\$200 was added to the total from which all collaborators (doctors, nurses, engineers, graduates, and technicians) were required to transfer 50% to the Cuban government, in effect, confiscating more than 50% of their salaries paid by Jamaica. Two members of the medical brigade in Jamaica also confirmed this to Grimal. Based on those payments, the highest net income—after deducting the transfer to the Cuban government—was that of the doctors, and amounted to US\$1,050, or US\$6.25 per hour for forty-hour work weeks.

Both doctors No. 1 and No. 2 confirmed that all collaborators were required to attend regular meetings convened by the regional head of mission. During these sessions, they were consistently instructed not to discuss politics, the situation in Cuba, or the internal workings of the brigade. They were also expected to comply with regulations that prohibited friendly or romantic relationships with locals unless authorized. Additionally, they were not allowed to leave their residence after 6 pm unless it was for work. They were also instructed to maintain a social media presence with messages supportive of Cuba and to engage in political proselytizing during election periods. Furthermore, they were mandated to take their vacations in Cuba, with no option to stay in Jamaica or travel to other

countries. Their flights had to be booked with Cubana de Aviación, and tickets were provided by the head of mission, with only one suitcase allowed (as opposed to the two allowed previously).

Cuban authorities claim that medical services are exported to fund the public health system. The National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI) reports enormous revenues from the export of health and social care services, particularly since the great expansion of Cuba's "internationalism" starting in Venezuela in 2005. In 2023, the last year reported, these revenues totalled \$4.4 billion. For the six years 2018 to 2023, ONEI statistics indicate that only 0.8% of export revenues from health and

<div> <div> <div>archivo</div> <div>CUBA</div> </div> <div> Cuba: State Investment 2018-2023 <i>in US\$ millions</i> </div> </div>				
	<i>Investment in health and social services</i>	<i>% of total investment for health and social services</i>	<i>Service exports in health and social services</i>	<i>% of service exports in health and social services invested in same</i>
2018	\$146.7	1.6%	\$6,398.5	0.8%
2019	\$96.9	1.0%	\$5,382.2	0.5%
2020	\$84.5	0.9%	\$3,997.9	1.1%
2021	\$42.2	1.7%	\$4,349.9	0.5%
2022	\$63.3	2.1%	\$4,882.2	0.6%
2023	<u>\$75.3</u>	<u>1.8%</u>	<u>\$4,449.3</u>	<u>1.7%</u>
Total	\$508.9		\$29,460.0	

Notes:
 * The table reflects historical data in the 2022 and 2023 Statistical Yearbooks.
 * The 2023 Yearbook changed previously reported data for most years.
 * ONEI reports investment in Cuban pesos and applies a USD exchange rate of 1:1 until 2020 and 1:24 starting in 2021.
 * In 2023, health & social care service exports were retitled "personal, cultural & recreational services."

⁵⁹ A. Grimal, Trafficking of doctors, op. cit.

social care have invested by the State in that area, and only 1.5% (annual average) of total investment was allocated to public health and social care.⁶⁰

To date, Cuba Archive has not seen the medical collaboration contract between Cuba and Jamaica, but bilateral agreements in health with other governments all oblige the partner, the host government, to not allow the collaborators to work outside the agreement. As we have already seen, the contract the collaborators must sign with the UCCM prohibits them from practicing medicine privately in Jamaica. This is expressed explicitly in the bilateral agreement of the educational brigade in Jamaica, as we will see. Therefore, it is presumed that Jamaica has agreed to prevent the independent hiring of the members of the Cuban medical brigade or any Cubans who have abandoned the mission, returned to Jamaica after having completed the mission and flown back to Cuba, or wish to be hired directly having been trained in Cuba. A nurse told Grimal that Cuba actively hinders the hiring of Cuban health professionals by health institutions in Jamaica and that nursing graduates are finding it increasingly difficult to access jobs outside of nursing homes.⁶¹

Cuba's educational brigade in Jamaica

Uninterrupted cooperation in education formally began in November 1997 with the signing of the first Cuba-Jamaica agreement for Cuban educators to teach in schools in Jamaica.⁶² In 1997, 18 arrived to teach primarily math and science in high schools.⁶³ The number of teachers in each time period is unknown and can only be elucidated from sporadic unofficial reports. In 2009, the Jamaican Ministry of Education decided to extend the Cuban presence into institutions of higher education and, with a revision of the Agreement in 2011, to hire them for three years instead of two.⁶⁴

In 1975, it was agreed to send Cuban experts to train young Jamaicans and promote local technological development.⁶⁵ Cultural and educational exchanges of technical and academic personnel were agreed upon, as well as scholarships for Jamaicans to study in Cuba.⁶⁶ As part of the agreements,

⁶⁰ See the annual statistical yearbooks, *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba*, Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas e Información, ONEI, República de Cuba, <https://www.onei.gob.cu/>. Look for the statistics reported in “Sector Externo” (External Sector), “Valor del comercio exterior de servicios exportados por divisiones,” as well as “Volumen de Inversiones por clase de actividad económica.” In 2023, ONEI retitled “human and social care services” as “personal, cultural, and recreational services” and reported significantly changed figures for previous years reported earlier under the previous title.

⁶¹ A. Grimal, *Trafficking of doctors*, op. cit.

⁶² “Agreement for Cooperation in Education for Professional and Academic Support between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information of Jamaica (acting for and on behalf of the Government of Jamaica) and the Ministry of Education (Mined) of the Republic of Cuba,” signed Apr. 29, 2021.

⁶³ “Education ministry recruits 24 Cuban teachers,” *The Gleaner*, Aug. 29, 2018.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ 453. Telegram 2743 from the embassy in Jamaica to the Department of State, Office of the Historian, US Department of State, Jul. 27, 1975.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

the Cuban regime built and equipped four educational centers, some conceived as boarding schools,⁶⁷ a modality widely used in Cuba. The reportedly donated schools were José Martí Technical High School (in St Catherine, founded in 1977),^{68/69} Garvey Maceo High School (located in May Pen, Clarendon, founded in 1980),⁷⁰ GC Foster College of Physical Education and Sports (en Angels, Spanish Town, founded in 1980)^{71/72} and Anchovy High School (in Montpelier, St. James, built in 1980).⁷³ The latter was conceived as an agricultural educational institution,⁷⁴ but was never used for that purpose,⁷⁵ and instead became a military base of the Jamaica Defence Force and a reception centre for Haitian refugees.⁷⁶ In 2014, the Government of Jamaica allocated 120 million Jamaican dollars to transform the Montpelier facilities into an educational centre.⁷⁷ It was officially inaugurated in 2015 with the participation of representatives of the Cuban Embassy and named “Fidel Castro Campus” of Anchovy High School in honor of the “revolutionary legacy” of the dictator.⁷⁸ Currently, there are Cuban medical and educational brigades in all the schools reportedly donated by Cuba.⁷⁹

In August 2018, an official in Jamaica's Ministry of Education, Dasmie Kennedy, said that to date Jamaica had recruited 369 Cuban teachers and which would be added to the 48 who were already in Jamaica, so they would reach 72.⁸⁰ She praised “the magnitude of the experience and expertise” of the Cubans, who were teaching Spanish, mathematics, physical education, agricultural sciences, chemistry, physics, biology and integrated sciences. In August 2019, Cuba reported that more than 31,000 Jamaicans had been taught by Cuban educators.⁸¹ By May 2021, 86 Cuban educators were said to be working in 78 schools across Jamaica—46 primary schools, 32 secondary schools, and 4 institutions at the tertiary level, meaning post-secondary education.⁸² Upon extending the bilateral

⁶⁷ “Jamaica-Cuba accord signed,” *The Gleaner*, Nov. 17, 1975.

⁶⁸ “Jose Marti Technical High's Founder's Day 2025,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Jan. 17, 1975.

⁶⁹ “Jose Marti Technical High School,” <https://josemartitechnicalhighschool.wordpress.com/>.

⁷⁰ “Garvey-Maceo High School Celebrates 45th Anniversary of Founding,” Minrex, May 19, 2025.

⁷¹ “GC Foster College poised for the next level at 45,” Our Today newsletter, CG Foster College, Mar. 25, 2025.

⁷² “Ambassador of Cuba to Jamaica participates in the graduation of the College of Physical Education and Sport “GC Foster,” Minrex, May 3, 2024.

⁷³ “Campus Fidel Castro: Fidel's legacy lives on in Jamaica,” Minrex, Nov. 24, 2022.

⁷⁴ “Gov't to spend \$120m on second campus for Anchovy High,” *Jamaica Observer*, Jun. 22, 2014.

⁷⁵ “PM Officially Opens the Fidel Castro Campus of the Anchovy High School,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Sep. 12, 2015.

⁷⁶ “Cuba remains committed to supporting Jamaica, says ambassador,” *Jamaica Observer*, Apr. 1, 2022.

⁷⁷ “Gov't to spend \$120m,” op. cit.

⁷⁸ “Directivos de la Escuela “Fidel Castro” visitan Embajada de Cuba en Jamaica,” Minrex, Mar. 11, 2021; “PM officially opens the Fidel Castro Campus,” op. cit.; “Apertura del Campus Fidel Castro,” *Jamaica Information Service* /Facebook, Sep. 11, 2015.

⁷⁹ In posts from 2018 and 2020, the official Facebook page of the Cuban Medical Brigade in Jamaica claimed that there were Cuban medical professionals located in St. James. On the same social network there are about twenty profiles associated with Cuban medical brigades in various locations in Jamaica, including May Pen, and also in Spanish Town, parish of St. Catherine.

⁸⁰ “Cuban teachers recruited,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Aug. 29, 2018.

⁸¹ “Cuba and Jamaica expand their cooperation in the education sector,” Minrex, Aug. 27, 2019.

⁸² R. Williams, op. cit.; “Cuba and Jamaica sign a new Agreement for Cooperation in Education,” Minrex, May 27, 2021.

agreement Jamaican Education Minister Fayval Williams highlighted “improved performance in the subjects taught, improved diplomatic relations between the governments of Jamaica and Cuba, and an increased number of students being exposed to a second language.”⁸³

In August 2024, Cuba reported that 530 Cubans had taught in Jamaica uninterrupted.⁸⁴ Theoretically, two brigades for three years each since 2018 means that each one would have 81 members (usually not all of them are teachers, since coordinators and supervisors are included). The current contingent arrived in Jamaica in August 2024 and is reportedly composed of 75 teachers.⁸⁵ No technical evaluations of the content and results of the instruction they provide have been found in open sources.

A 2004 study of the presence of Cuban teachers in Jamaica and Namibia found that until that year the role of Cuban educators in Jamaica was limited to participating “in existing systems” and had no impact on the elaboration of curricular content or to “design and develop new educational structures and approaches.”⁸⁶ However, a study published in 2023 by an official from Jamaica’s Ministry of Education confirms that Cuban teachers are training their Jamaican colleagues⁸⁷ and notes that they were involved in the drafting and revision of primary and secondary Spanish curricula in Jamaica.⁸⁸

Despite a large deficit of teachers in Cuba, the Cuban government exports them to Jamaica and other countries, such as The Bahamas, where there is currently an educational brigade of around 130 teachers.⁸⁹ In 2022, during a courtesy visit with Jamaica’s Minister of Education, Fayval Williams, Cuba’s Ambassador, Fermín Quiñones Sánchez, proposed sending special education teachers and school psychologists to Jamaica to serve students with disabilities and specific educational needs. He highlighted the positive experience of this type of cooperation in other Caribbean countries and used as an example “a very important program” with the Bahamas.⁹⁰ In 2023, Quiñones Sánchez proposed expanding cooperation to address an educational crisis in Jamaica caused by the massive emigration of more than 1,000 teachers to the United States, the United Kingdom and the Middle East in search of better working conditions.⁹¹ The Ambassador said: “There is no limitation from Cuba’s side about

⁸³ “Jamaica and Cuba extend education agreement,” *The Gleaner*, May 27, 2021.

⁸⁴ “New Cuban teachers arrive in Jamaica,” Minrex, Aug. 29, 2024.

⁸⁵ “75 Cuban teachers in local education system this year,” *Jamaica Observer*, Sep. 3, 2024.

⁸⁶ South–South collaboration: Cuban teachers in Jamaica and Namibia, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2, May 2004.

⁸⁷ Martha Luisa Corbett Baugh, “The Binational Educational Collaboration between Jamaica and Cuba (2019–2022),” *International Journal of the Humanities* 10(1): 17–38, 2023. The author has been working for the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Jamaica since 2001.

⁸⁸ Alpheia Sumner, “Teaching Council reversal,” *Jamaica Observer*, Sep. 16, 2022; Alicia Dunkley-Willis, “Nothing but fluff. Educator pours scorn on criticism of teacher-training colleges,” *Jamaica Observer*, Sep. 9, 2024.

⁸⁹ Ver “Cuba’s Medical and Educational Brigades in The Bahamas: a disconcerting “cooperation,” Cuba Archive, Apr. 28, 2025.

⁹⁰ “Cuba proposes special-ed teachers, psychologists for local schools,” *The Gleaner*, Oct. 6, 2022.

⁹¹ “We can supply you with more teachers, Cuba tells Jamaica,” *Jamaica Observer*, Sep. 24, 2023.

any request that would be made by the Jamaican Government and the Ministry of Education to continue supporting the education sector,” adding that it was possible to bring in new teachers from Cuba, not only of Spanish but, also, more science teachers.⁹² Meanwhile, according to Cuba’s Ministry of Education, the country had just started the school year with a deficit of 17,278 teachers, including 3,200 in junior high school, where Spanish Literature was one of the affected subjects.⁹³ To date, there is no public evidence that the ambassador’s proposal materialized.

Cuba Archive obtained through unofficial channels a copy of the agreement signed on May 26, 2021⁹⁴ by Jamaica’s Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) and Cuba’s Ministry of Education (MINED).⁹⁵ Valid for three years and renewable for two years, it may be terminated by any of the parties with a six-month notice. If extended, as presumed, it is in force until May 26, 2026, unless it has been replaced or its validity altered by a mutual agreement —confidentially, as usual.

Under the agreement, Cuban “specialists” —as the teachers and other members of the brigade are called— will work in Jamaica for two years, which can be extended for an additional year to a maximum of three years. The points of contact of the two parties are the former Cuban ambassador to Jamaica, Inés Fors Fernández, and an official of the Ministry of Education of Jamaica, Dr. Kasan Troupe.

The agreement contains clauses that appear in health collaboration agreements examined by Cuba Archive; they illustrate that the government of Jamaica, represented by the Ministry of Education, MOEYI, is a willing participant in usual trafficking practices of Cuba’s labor export scheme, as the MOEYI accepts:

1. to “not to contract or hire any of the recruited specialists for in the public education system in Jamaica in the event that any these specialists choose to permanently cease providing the services as agreed under the Agreement of this agreement. In this event the MOEYI will, as appropriate, use its best endeavours to undertake the necessary steps to secure cancellation of the work permit from the Ministry responsible for labour in Jamaica.” (2.2.18);
2. that a Cuban Coordinator selected by MINED “will coordinate, guide and oversee the performance of the specialists at all schools...” (4.1);

⁹² Ibid.

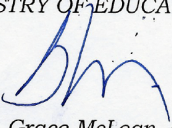
⁹³ “Cuba applies alternatives to the deficit of teachers in Basic Secondary Education,” YouTube: Canal Caribe, Oct. 22, 2023.

⁹⁴ “Agreement for Cooperation in Education for Professional and Academic Support between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information of Jamaica (acting for and on behalf of the Government of Jamaica) and the Ministry of Education (Mined) of the Republic of Cuba, signed on April 29, 2021 by Dr. Grace McLean, OD, JP, Acting Permanent Secretary for and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information of Jamaica.” Fue rubricado el 29 de abril de 2021 por la doctora Grace McLean, Secretaria Permanente en Funciones del Ministerio de Educación de Jamaica (MOEYI), y el 26 de mayo de 2021 por Inés Fors Fernández, la entonces embajadora de Cuba en Jamaica. (Copy of the agreement delivered to Cuba Archive in June 2025; Rochelle Williams, “Jamaica and Cuba extend education agreement,” *Jamaica Information Service*, May 27, 2021.)

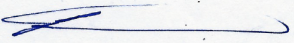
⁹⁵ “Jamaica – Cuba Cooperation Agreement in Education, 2021,” [Cuba Archive](#).

3. that the specialist's service may be terminated prematurely “as a result of disciplinary measures” (7.3); and
4. that both sides may withdraw the specialists for “non-compliance with the rules laid down.” (8.1)

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF
THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH & INFORMATION OF JAMAICA


By:  Dr. Grace McLean, OD, JP
Acting Permanent Secretary

Date: April 29, 2021


Witness: 

Date: 4/5/2021

FOR AND ON BEHALF OF
THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CUBA

By:  HE. Inés Fors Fernández
Ambassador

Date: May 26, 2021

Witness: 

Date: 26-5-2021

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For those who are unaware of the typical confiscatory practices of internationalists' salaries, the agreement does guarantee Cuban teachers a full salary (although it does not specify how it will be paid), protection of their physical integrity, and respect for their legal rights in Jamaica.⁹⁶ The MOEYI “shall pay the salaries of the specialists monthly basis, in accordance with the scales, qualifications and years of experience of the specialist, and in keeping with the salaries paid to local teachers in similar positions. Salaries should not differ between local teachers and specialists. Equal wages shall be paid and shall be standardized in accordance with the applicable Jamaican law.”⁹⁷ Recruitment includes payment of full salary during periods of sick leave. In practice, however, the Cuban government forces teachers to transfer a large part of their salaries to the designated heads of the brigade.

The cost to Jamaica of the Cuban educational mission must be high, as the agreement also obligates the MOEYI to provide Cuban specialists (teachers) with the following:

⁹⁶ Even when announcing the signing of the agreement in 2021, the Jamaican government reported that it guaranteed equal conditions, equal pay, work insurance and protection under Jamaican law. (R. Williams, “Jamaica and Cuba extend education agreement,” op. cit.)

⁹⁷ Art. 3, “Agreement for Cooperation in Education,” op. cit.

1. teaching resources: materials, facilities, technical and support staff;
2. permits, visas, criminal records, and any other necessary authorizations;
3. assistance in finding suitable rental accommodation (paid for by the specialist) near the assigned school;
4. international airfare at the beginning and end of the contract, as well as for summer vacations;
5. medical insurance three months after arriving;
6. outpatient hospital and dental care;
7. in case of illness, air transport if medical evacuation to Cuba is required and medical assistance until then;
8. half of the cost of air transportation to Cuba in the event of the death of parents, children, siblings, or spouse;
9. work accident insurance that covers death or partial and/or permanent disability;
10. in the event of the death of the specialist, storage and repatriation of the body to Cuba, medical and legal services, plus round-trip travel for a companion; and
11. transportation, accommodation, and meals when the specialist must travel on official duty (not defined).

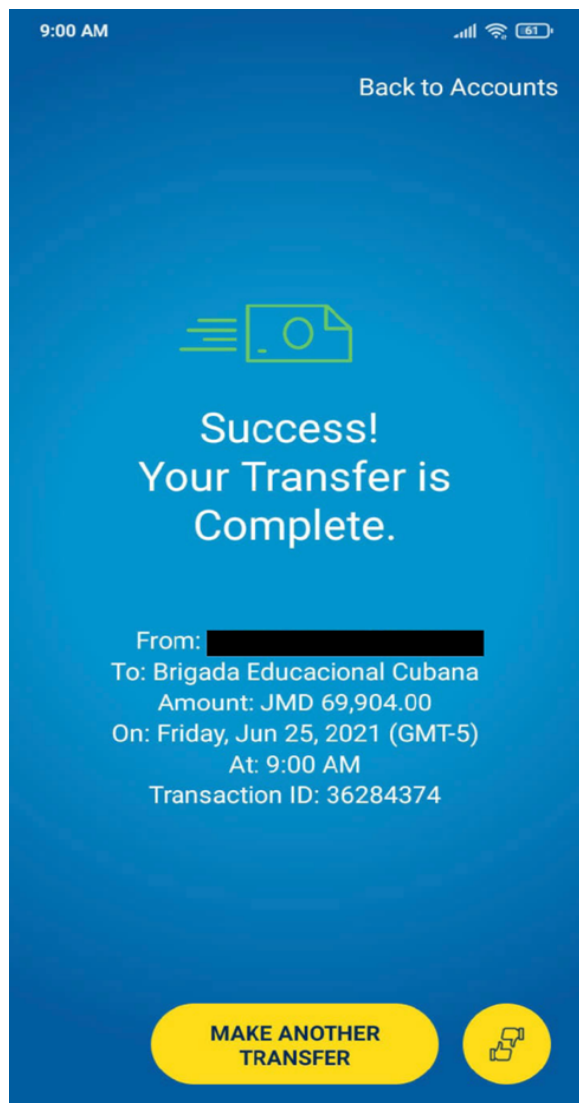
A teacher who was part of the educational mission in Jamaica in 2022, Anonymous Source No. 3, has provided Cuba Archive a testimony of his experiences there,⁹⁸ which follows.

He had been an English teacher in Cuba. In Jamaica, he taught Spanish for two years at a school located more than a hundred miles from the capital, Kingston, as part of a brigade of 18 Cuban teachers. He maintains that there were many similar groups distributed throughout the country. As his contingent was sent during the COVID pandemic, its members were chosen only by Cuban authorities. Before the pandemic, he says, a delegation from Jamaica went to Cuba to interview the candidates for the educational mission, who were first selected by Cuba and then finally selected by Jamaica with the participation and endorsement of the Cuban authorities.

They signed a contract with the Cuban entity they knew as ICE (Institute for Educational Collaboration) and not with any Jamaican entity. The contract stipulated that they would receive a “stipend” equivalent to US\$500 and did not define where they would work.

Jamaica paid them directly in Jamaican dollars with deposits into individual accounts in their names at the National Commercial Bank Jamaica, NCB Bank. When they received the monthly payment, they received “directive” from the head of the brigade informing them of the amount they

⁹⁸ Anonymous Source No. 3, video conference interview with Maria Werlau, May 31, 2025. The name and details are kept confidential for fear of reprisals.



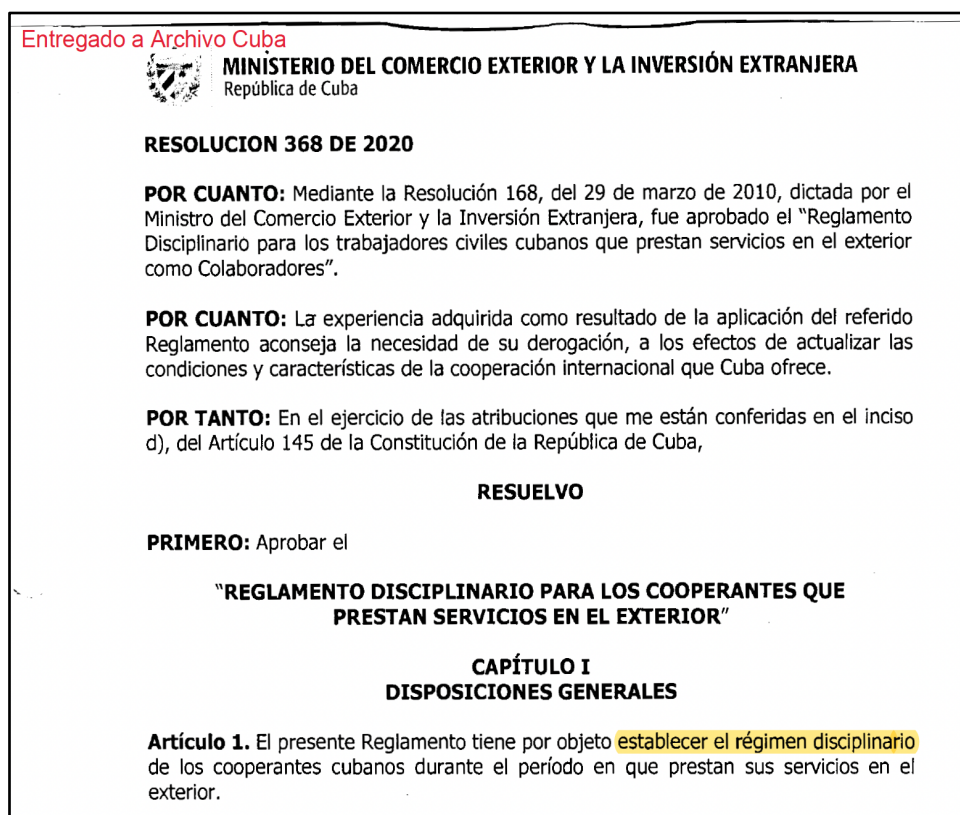
had to “remit” (transfer) to an account in the name of “Cuban Educational Brigade.” See a copy of a transfer receipt on the left, with the name of the sender redacted to protect this source.⁹⁹ The collaborator provided Cuba Archive copy of thirteen such transfers that he reports to have made between May 2021 and May 2022. The exact figure of each transfer depended on the referential US dollar exchange rate dictated to them and was equivalent to about half of the monthly salary paid by Jamaica of about US\$1,420. On average, they were allowed to keep the equivalent of US\$500 a month to pay rent, electricity, water, internet and all their expenses for food, transportation and others. Some —or many— ate little and poorly (often just rice) in order to save. The monthly salary of non-Cuban teachers in Jamaica was around US\$1,000 and up to US\$2,000 at the university level. As is customary in all internationalist missions, they also received their measly salary in Cuban pesos in Cuba, equivalent to much less than a hundred dollars a month and which the Cuban government deposited on a card.

Many of his fellow teachers and school administrators in Jamaica knew that Cubans were required to “contribute” much of their salary to their government, but brigade members were instructed to justify it as a contribution to sustaining Cuba’s education and health system. They rented the house in their name with assistance from the school and paid the rent directly, at a cost equivalent to about US\$130 per month. Jamaica paid for plane tickets (they could only travel on the Cuban airline) if they decided to travel to Cuba on vacation in December, but had to pay for their airport transportation in both Jamaica and Cuba.

Many of the Cuban teachers lived in environments of great insecurity and criminality. He and many of his colleagues were assaulted and he also learned that some in other locations had been kidnapped to demand a reward —he ignores how those cases were solved. They were forbidden to leave after 6pm and had to receive prior authorization in order to travel to any other locations in the country, even to simply go shopping. The brigade heads took their passports and they were forbidden

⁹⁹ Cuba Archive has a copy of thirteen similar transfers from the same collaborator dated from May 2021 to May 2022.

to engage in social relations with Jamaicans or any Cubans residing in the country not authorized by the embassy. In 2018, during teachers strike to demand pay increases, they were barred from participating. They could invite family in Cuba to visit them but for no more than 15 days, and they had to obtain prior permission and pay all their travel and accommodation expenses. They were supposed to post social media content favorable to Cuba and the brigade on their personal accounts. The Facebook page of the Educational Brigade is an example of the ideological-political characteristics of the brigade.¹⁰⁰ Like all internationalists, he had to abide by the disciplinary regime established in the Regulations, providing Cuba Archive his copy, an excerpt of which appears on the previous page and in its entirety on Cuba Archive's website.¹⁰¹



Excerpt from the Regulations that apply to all workers exported by the Cuban government and to all Cubans who travel abroad on official missions.

Reinel Isalgué Isalgué, the head of the educational brigade, served solely in a supervisory and oversight capacity; he did not engage in teaching. Teachers received “directives” (“orientaciones”), instructions by email from the brigade head from the Educational Brigade’s email account becjamaica@gmail.com), of which Cuba Archive has several. They also had to attend group meetings with supervisors, usually monthly, to receive instructions, commemorate revolutionary dates, and

¹⁰⁰ Brigada Educativa Cubana en Jamaica, [Facebook](#).

¹⁰¹ [Reglamento](#), op. cit.

participate in political activities. One such directive, dated May 12, 2022 reads:¹⁰² “Based on certain incidents that have arisen regarding compliance with the Disciplinary Regulations, and taking into account the complex situation that exists regarding violence, we reiterate the following directives:

1. Read and study MINCEX Resolution 368/2020 “Disciplinary Regulations,” particularly chapters II Duties of Collaborators, IV Disciplinary Infractions and V Disciplinary Measures.
2. Limit as much as possible non-essential personal outings from your region and community of residence.
3. Participation in all types of festive and recreational activities of a personal nature is prohibited, whether in public or private recreational institutions, beaches, rivers, etc.
4. Authorization and approval from the Coordinator must be requested to participate in recreational activities organized by the schools.
5. Collaborators are forbidden from leaving the Region or Parish where they live without prior authorization from the Coordinator.
6. Extreme measures must be taken when going on shopping trips in the downtown areas of each Region; especially in Kingston and Spanish Town.”

VII. VIAJE DE VACACIONES A CUBA Y REMESA DEL MES DE AGOSTO.

- a) El viaje de ida está propuesto que se realice el mismo día en dos vuelos, uno hacia Santiago de Cuba y otro hacia La Habana. Igualmente debe suceder al regreso, pero en sentido contrario. Las fechas de los vuelos están pendientes por definir, pero todos los colaboradores deben estar listos a partir del sábado 02 de julio.
- b) **Para el vuelo de ida, solo se podrá llevar un (1) equipaje de 30 Kg; más el equipaje de manos de cinco (5) kg y la jaba de mujer o carpeta de la laptop. El colaborador que viole estas indicaciones, se hace completamente responsable de las consecuencias que pueda tener.**
- c) Al arribar a Cuba, todos los colaboradores entregarán su Pasaporte a los funcionarios del ICE o Relaciones Internacionales, según corresponda; y en el caso de los continuantes lo recibirán en el mismo aeropuerto a su retorno a Jamaica.
- d) Para el traslado desde los aeropuertos hacia las provincias de residencia (en la ida) y desde las provincias hacia los Aeropuertos (al regreso), se empleará el transporte mínimo imprescindible, teniendo en cuenta la compleja situación económica que tiene el país, tanto con las finanzas como con el combustible.
- e) Los familiares de los colaboradores que viajen junto a ellos en los vuelos, no podrán emplear bajo ningún concepto este transporte.
- f) Todos los colaboradores continuantes, deben mantenerse informados, con relación al proceso de remesa correspondiente al mes de agosto de 2022.


 Reynel Isalgue Isalgue
 Coordinador de la Brigada Educativa
**BRIGADA EDUCACIONAL
 CUBA-JAMAICA**

Directive (Indicación) No. 08, Year 2022, sent to the Cuban teachers in Jamaica by the Coordinator of Cuba's educational brigade, from Kingston, May 12, 2022.

¹⁰² Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica, Kingston, May 12, 2022, Directive (Indicación) No. 08, Year 2022, excerpt from point “III. Compliance with disciplinary regulations, the situation that Jamaica presents with violence and measures to guarantee the protection and physical integrity of employees.” (Translations from Spanish).

The same directive also established the rules for the return trip to Cuba of those who had fulfilled their mission and states that they will be informed of their last “remittance” to the Cuban government (see above).

When the teacher providing the testimony left the mission, his family in Cuba was warned that he had “deserted” and told to let him know that he would be sentenced to 2 to 8 years in prison if he returned to Cuba. The threat is legally supported by Article 176 of the Penal Code in force in Cuba; it is a carbon copy of its predecessor, Article 135 of the former Penal Code, which since at least 1986 penalizes with penalties of up to eight years in prison those who abandon functions in the so-called “international missions.”¹⁰³

Ideological penetration in Jamaica's classrooms

In 1973, with Michael Manley in power, the Jamaican government launched the National Youth Service (NYS), a two-year program for high school graduates aimed at integrating them into community work. It was criticized from its inception due to its association with socialist policies and the perception that it was a form of “free labor.”¹⁰⁴ Jamaica's middle and upper classes opposed having their children sent to work in remote areas for a symbolic remuneration and rejected its similarities with Cuba's Union of Young Communists and the literacy campaign of the early days of the revolution.¹⁰⁵ The program was suspended in 1983 due to budgetary



Jamaican children at the “tribute of the teachers and professors of the Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica” to José Martí on the 128th Anniversary of his fall in combat. [Facebook](#) of the Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica, May 19, 2023.

¹⁰³ See Maria C. Werlau, *Cuban Medical Brigades: Forced Labor with an Altruistic Façade, Compendium of Information*, Washington, D.C., Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, Apr. 2025

¹⁰⁴ “New Cuba policy stirs Caribbean memories,” NPR, Dec. 21, 2014

¹⁰⁵ “Manley’s declaration of democratic socialism rattled ruling class,” *Jamaica Observer*, Aug. 25, 2024.

constraints and since re-launched, at least twice;¹⁰⁶ apparently it is currently active.¹⁰⁷

The Cuban teachers in Jamaica are mostly assigned to marginalized communities and the educational program has a progressive political undertone.¹⁰⁸ Dozens of promotional publications of the Cuban Educational Brigade¹⁰⁹ illustrate that the Cuban teachers reproduce ideological aspects of the communist educational system in their class work in Jamaica. Cuba's embassy in Kingston, together with the educational brigade and the Simón Bolívar Cultural Center, organize events under the umbrella of promoting Spanish culture and language. The activities for underage students promote a revolutionary and warmongering narrative with content favorable to Cuba's founding father José Martí, Fidel Castro, and Bolivarianism.¹¹⁰

In May 2024, Ambassador Quiñones Sánchez exalted Simón Bolívar, José Martí, and the “Commander in Chief” —referring to Fidel Castro— as pillars of the unity of the peoples of Latin America. According to a note from Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations, dissemination of Martí's thought “was multiplied through-out the Jamaican geography in the educational centres that have members of the Educational Brigade, especially in the parish of St. James.”¹¹¹ The activities include didactic materials exalting figures such as Fidel Castro and Che Guevara —presented as “liberators of the Caribbean” —, songs with patriotic undertones, and proselytizing speeches.¹¹² In May 2025, for the most recent anniversary of the fall in combat of the hero of Cuba's independence, José Martí, the Cuban ambassador “ratified the validity of Martí's Latin Americanist and anti-imperialist thinking in the face of the new onslaught of Yankee imperialism against the peoples of Our America; reiterating the call for the unity of the Latin American and Caribbean peoples made by President Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermudez during the IX Summit of CELAC.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ “New Cuba policy stirs Caribbean memories,” op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ National Youth Policy, Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information.

¹⁰⁸ Ruth Ratcliffe, “Functional and critical literacy in Yo Sí Puedo an examination of Cuba's literacy program through a Freirean lens,” Thesis, Open Research Newcastle, 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Summary of the 2020 - 2021 School Year, Facebook: Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica.

¹¹⁰ “Ambassador of Cuba to Jamaica participates,” op. cit.; “Simón Bolívar Cultural Centre - Ode to a revolutionary,” *The Gleaner*, Oct. 2, 2015; and “Jamaican and Cuban students pay homage to the Apostle,” Minrex, May 17, 2024.

¹¹¹ “Jamaican and Cuban students pay homage,” op. cit.

¹¹² Facebook: Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica, May 19, 2023; “Simón Bolívar Cultural Center exhibits a mural with the images of Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro presented as Liberators of the Caribbean,” Facebook: Olde Jamaica Tours; “Celebrated in Jamaica the 167th Anniversary of José Martí's birth,” Minrex, Jan. 28, 2020; “Tribute to José Martí in Jamaica on the 130th anniversary of his fall in combat,” Minrex, May 16, 2025.

¹¹³ The event, held at the Simón Bolívar Cultural Center, was attended by members of the Cuban diplomatic mission headed by Cuba's Ambassador, Fermín Quiñones Sánchez, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, the diplomatic corps, members of the Cuba solidarity movement and of the Cuban Educational Brigade in Jamaica, as well as students of different levels of education. (“Tribute to José Martí in Jamaica,” op. cit.)

The cultural program replicates the widespread practice in Cuba of “political acts disguised as cultural activities, loaded with a wide repertoire of political-ideological vehemence.”¹¹⁴ It stems from the overt politicization of education since the educational reform of 1962, which conceives education as an instrument at the service of power,¹¹⁵ with children the main recipients.¹¹⁶ Cuba's official websites spread the importance that Fidel Castro gave to “political-ideological education”¹¹⁷ and his speeches and phrases are commonly used as teaching material in history classes in Cuba.¹¹⁸ The promoted vision of the world is aligned with the interests of the regime, and secondary and upper secondary education are structured on the principles of Marxism-Leninism.¹¹⁹

As part of the educational cooperation agreement with Jamaica, in 2009 Cuba implemented the literacy program “Yes, I can” (“Yo sí puedo”), designed for English-speaking countries. It emerged from the 1961 literacy campaign in Cuba¹²⁰ and is regarded by some for its effective methods in teaching reading and writing, but criticized for serving as an ideological vehicle. It was introduced by member of Jamaica's Parliament Robert Montague in the community of Gayle of St. Mary's, a parish with one of the highest illiteracy rates on the island, 34%. In 2010, the program was expanded to other communities with the support of about 20 churches, and benefits around 400 people.¹²¹

Other areas of collaboration

Scholarships

Despite Cuba's severe economic-financial crisis, the Cuban government apparently continues its legendary practice of awarding scholarships to foreign students to study in Cuba, a key aspect of its internationalist diplomacy. The scholarships have traditionally covered tuition, accommodation, meals, clothing allowance, study materials, and medical care for four to seven years of study (the first year dedicated to studying Spanish).¹²² It is often claimed that Cuba awards scholarships massively. In June 2025, Cuba's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Yuri Gala

¹¹⁴ “La manipulación y el adoctrinamiento de los niños en Cuba,” *CubaCID*, Apr. 4, 2021. (Translation from Spanish.)

¹¹⁵ “Reforma de Educación Superior de 1962 inhabilitó autonomía universitaria en Cuba,” *Martí Noticias*, Nov. 10, 2020; “Situación de los derechos humanos en Cuba,” Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, OEA/Ser.L/V/II, Doc. 2, 2020.

¹¹⁶ “Adoctrinamiento vs. realidad: la pelea perdida por la Educación en Cuba,” *Diario de Cuba*, Jan. 10, 2023.

¹¹⁷ “La educación político-ideológica en la escuela cubana, desde el pensamiento político de Fidel Castro,” *Razones de Cuba*, January 12, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Adoctrinamiento político en la enseñanza: ¿efectivo o no?, *Martí Noticias*, Aug. 30, 2013; S. Angel, O. Ruiz Urquiola, et. al., “Politización y subordinación del pensamiento en el Sistema de Educación Superior en Cuba,” Informe no.15, Observatorio de Libertad Académica, octubre de 2021, ISBN: 978-958-53656-4-3.

¹¹⁹ Ministerial Resolution No. 76/05, Extraordinary Official Gazette No. 30 of Nov. 9, 2005.

¹²⁰ “‘Yo, Si Puedo’ (Yes, I Can) literacy programme in Cuba,” UNESCO.

¹²¹ “Plans Advanced for ‘Yes I Can’ II,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Jul. 10, 2010.

¹²² “Seven Jamaicans awarded full scholarships,” op. cit.

López, said in New York that the Latin American School of Medicine had “trained 31,000 doctors from 122 countries free of charge.”¹²³ However, it is unclear whether the Cuban government actually covers everything said to be offered to the foreign students reported as scholarship recipients. Many study in Cuba with their own financing or are believed to have scholarships from their own governments, other governments, international organizations or private entities.¹²⁴ As there are no verifiable reports or any transparency in this regard, it is impossible to elucidate how many students from Jamaica and other countries have actually been granted scholarships by Cuba. The public language surrounding the scholarships lends itself to confusion.

The number of Jamaican students in Cuba is already highly fluctuating or uncertain. In May 2025, Ambassador Quiñones Sánchez, said that more than 300 Jamaicans were studying in Cuba and around 700 had graduated by 2024.¹²⁵ In 2024 it was reported that around 100 Jamaicans were studying in Cuba annually,¹²⁶ while for the 2009-10 academic year 300 Jamaican students were reported in Cuban universities.¹²⁷

There has been a “bilateral” scholarship programme (“Cuba/Jamaica Bilateral Cuba Scholarship Programme”)¹²⁸ of which almost nothing is known, but for which the Jamaican government has at least a role in the selection of students. It is unknown whether Jamaica provides partial or full funding for the scholarships. In June 2025, it was reported that “within the framework of the Cuba-Jamaica Bilateral Scholarship Program,” fourteen Jamaican students had received full scholarships for the academic year beginning in August 2025. The students will enrol in undergraduate and graduate programs in Cuba in medicine, nursing, dentistry, veterinary, accounting, ophthalmology and others. Ambassador Quiñones Sánchez noted that the scholarships reflected the strength of the relationship between the two countries and were “a symbol of the humanist and solidarity-based character of the Cuban Revolution and of Cuba’s cooperative relations with sister nations of the Caribbean, including Jamaica.”¹²⁹

¹²³ Sandra Latham, “New York meeting promotes effort to send pacemakers to Cuba,” New York, *The Militant*, Vol. 89, No. 24, Jul. 14, 2025.

¹²⁴ PAHO, for example, finances scholarships in Cuba. A PAHO publication from 2002 provides the greatest detail that can be found in public sources and covers the period from 1983 to 1985, when 421 scholarships were awarded (83 in 1983, 138 in 1984 and 128 in 1985) in public health administration, nursing, communicable diseases, medical education and related sciences. Clinical medicine, human resources, health education, environmental health, maternal and child health, primary care, production of biological substances, prevention and control of diseases, essential medicines, gerontology, chronic diseases, new technologies, oral health, veterinary medicine and scientific and technical information. (PAHO/WHO Cuba Technical Cooperation Report 2012-2013, Pan American Health Organization, World Health Organization, OPS.org, p. 16.)

¹²⁵ “Students receive full scholarships to study in Cuba,” *The Gleaner*, May 31, 2025.

¹²⁶ J. Clark, op. cit.

¹²⁷ “Seven Jamaicans awarded full scholarships to study in Cuba,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Sep. 13, 2010.

¹²⁸ “Apply for the Cuba/Jamaica Bilateral Cuba Scholarship Programme 2025-2026,” accessed Jul. 3, 2025.

¹²⁹ Britney Stevens, “Students receive full scholarships to study in Cuba,” *Jamaica Information Service*, May 29, 2025.

In December 2022, during the eighth CARICOM-Cuba Summit held in Barbados, Cuba had committed to expanding its scholarship offerings to Caribbean countries starting in September 2024 — from six or seven annual scholarships to twenty-one. If fourteen out of twenty-one scholarships had been awarded to Jamaicans alone, only seven would be left for the other fourteen Caricom member countries.¹³⁰ In 2013, it had been announced that scholarships had been awarded to seven Jamaican students “within the framework of the bilateral program” —three to pursue medical careers and four to study physical education and sports.^{131/132} The report does not say who financed the scholarships, but if there is seven the maximum number of annual scholarships that Cuba gave to students from all Caribbean countries, it is likely that the Jamaican government is financing the aforementioned scholarships.

No matter who pays for the Jamaican scholarship recipients, the students have faced serious difficulties for many years; this has led to many protests, even violent ones, among students from various nationalities.¹³³ In 2020, some 40 Jamaican medical students in Cuba told Jamaica's *The Gleaner*, that the pandemic had aggravated poor conditions, “claiming that food shortages, xenophobia, and limited sanitisation products continue to threaten their mental and physical health;” they were asking Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness to help them return to their country.¹³⁴ In July 2021, a Jamaican medical student told another Jamaican media outlet that “we are all having a hard time in Cuba right now. Every week I see myself losing weight, probably from stress and the fact that there's no transportation for the longest while and I have to walk everywhere I go.”¹³⁵ He also noted that internet access was very limited and that there were no online classes.

More bilateral cooperation

The Jamaica-Cuba collaboration also has Cuba:

1. sending engineers to Jamaica to train and assist in the implementation of “important engineering, medical and agricultural technologies” that Cuba shares with Jamaica;¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Member states and associate members, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), accessed Jul. 3, 2025.

¹³¹ “Seven Jamaicans awarded full scholarships to study in Cuba,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Sep. 13, 2010; Joanne Clark, “Cuba expands scholarship opportunities for Jamaicans,” *Caribbean National Weekly*, Mar. 12, 2024.

¹³² Medicc, a U.S. nongovernmental organization, provides partial scholarships to students of the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in Cuba. (“MD Pipeline to Community Service,” Medicc, accessed Jul. 3, 2025.

¹³³ See some examples of protests by students from Pakistan, Ghana, South Africa and Congo in Cuba: “Sigue el éxodo de estudiantes extranjeros,” *Martí Noticias*, 11 de marzo de 2013; “We weren't allowed to flush,” *Africa*, Mar. 25, 2013, “Protesta de estudiantes congoleños, el motivo del cerco policial a la embajada del Congo en Cuba,” Havana, *Diario de Cuba*, Mar. 27, 2019; Wilfredo Cancio, “Cuatro estudiantes del Congo fueron heridos en incidente violento con fuerzas antimotines en La Habana,” *CiberCuba*, Apr. 9, 2019.

¹³⁴ Tamara Bailey, “Slamming shortages, med students in Cuba plead to come home,” *The Gleaner*, Apr. 27, 2020.

¹³⁵ “Jamaican med student details tough times in Cuba,” *Jamaica Observer*, Jul. 18, 2021.

¹³⁶ “PNP thanks the Government and People of Cuba for supporting Jamaica,” Cuba Minrex, Mar. 29, 2020 (reproduction of “People's National Party of Jamaica,” *Sunday Sun*, Vol. 4, Extra Issue, Mar. 29, 2020).

2. training Jamaican ophthalmologists and assisting in the maintenance of ophthalmological equipment;¹³⁷
3. assisting in the development of agriculture in Jamaica;¹³⁸ and
4. providing training to repair medical equipment in health centers in Jamaica.¹³⁹

Presumably, the Government of Jamaica pays Cuba for those services and the Cuban “collaborators” deployed to Havana go on official missions, subject to similar terms as the brigades.

Disinformation and propaganda

Medical diplomacy is perhaps Cuba's main propaganda tool aimed at legitimizing its regime and advancing its agendas internationally. A huge apparatus dedicated to disinformation, propaganda, and influence is behind Cuba's facade as a medical and educational power dedicated to humanitarianism and internationalist solidarity.¹⁴⁰ Gigantic human and material resources have been dedicated for decades to promoting Cuba's mythological achievements in health and education, and to systematically disseminating manipulated statistics. The utopian image is far from the real Cuba, plagued with chronic shortages of just about everything, including basic supplies, with a large deficit of teachers and doctors, and many hospitals and schools lacking even running water.

Cuban medical brigades usually include personnel exclusively charged with keeping meticulous statistics of the health services provided, but Cuban doctor No. 2 reports that this is not the case in Jamaica. Cuba Archive has long been informed that members of missions in many countries are forced to systematically manipulate statistics to yield favourable results. Jamaican and Cuban authorities, however, do offer uncorroborated data that seems impossible to achieve from a practical perspective given the number of doctors reported in the brigade in Jamaica. Whether local authorities have independent verification procedures to verify this data is unknown.

The statistics cited by Cuban and Jamaican government officials seem impressive –we have seen some earlier. In 2023, Cuba's ambassador to Jamaica, Quiñones Sánchez, asserted, without providing details, that Cuban doctors in Jamaica performed from two to three million consultations

¹³⁷ “Jamaica and Cuba highlight results of joint ophthalmological program,” op. cit.

¹³⁸ “Jamaica and Cuba discuss increased agricultural partnership,” Kingston, *Jamaica Observer*, Dec. 23, 2022.

¹³⁹ “Jamaican company in partnership with Cuban counterpart to repair medical equipment,” Radio Jamaica, Jun. 22, 2024. (In 2024, The Jacden Group of Companies of Jamaica signed an agreement with BioCubaFarma, the Cuban state-owned biotechnology conglomerate, for the International Caribbean University of Jamaica and the University of Havana to participate in a program for which The Jacden Group was building the facilities to assemble medical equipment in Jamaica.)

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Cuba's outsized international presence,” Cuba Archive, Dec. 19, 2023; and María C. Werlau, *The Pan American Health Organization and Cuba: A Controversial Collaboration*, Washington, D.C., Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, Oct. 27, 2022; in particular see the sections: Validating problematic data, p. 17; Obfuscated Reports, p. 27 and Propaganda in favor of Cuba, p. 134.

and more than 3,000 surgeries.¹⁴¹ In October 2020, during the pandemic and with a Cuban emergency brigade in Jamaica, the Cuban agency Prensa Latina reported that the 413 Cuban internationalists had saved 5,081 lives, provided health care to 270,775 patients from April to September and by the end of August had performed 53,329 nursing procedures and 200 surgeries in hospitals in the four regions and 14 parishes of Jamaica.¹⁴² Cuba's official media reported that, since the first Cuban medical mission in Algeria in 1963 and until April 2024, more than 600,000 Cuban health professionals had provided their services abroad in 165 countries, with more than 2.3 billion patients treated, saving more than 12,127,000 lives, performing 17 million surgeries and assisting in the birth of some 5 million children.¹⁴³



Photo: *Minrex Cuba*, Mar. 29, 2020.

With or without extolling statistical achievements, the propaganda surrounding the Cuban medical brigade in Jamaica is extensive. According to the local press, since 1976 "Jamaicans have benefited significantly from the Cuban government's generosity with scholarships and cooperation in

¹⁴¹ Alicia Dunkley-Willis, "All lies,' Cuban ambassador slams US report that his country is trafficking medical professionals in Jamaica, *Jamaica Observer*, Oct. 2, 2023.

¹⁴² "Cuban collaborators save more than 5,000 lives in Jamaica," *SKN News*, Oct. 9, 2020.

¹⁴³ Oscar Bravo Fong, "Heralds of Health and Life," Cuban Radio, Jun. 26, 2025.

the field of health care.”¹⁴⁴ Several Cuba solidarity groups in Jamaica promote Cuban medical diplomacy and internationalism and provide political and economic support to the regime —these include Friends of Cuba (Jamaica), Jamaican Cuba Solidarity Movement, Peace Council, Patriotic Movement, Friendship Association, Jamaica Peace Council & Friendship Association, and an independent group of members of the People's National Party of Jamaica.¹⁴⁵ The intense social activism includes campaigns against the U.S. “blockade” and shipping humanitarian aid to Cuba. It fits within a global network directed from Cuba with a dedicated government apparatus that at the end of 2022 had 1,649 friendship associations in 150 countries and 73 alumni associations in 62 countries.¹⁴⁶ Its produces effective results. In Jamaica, for example, the opposition spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade in the Jamaican Parliament, Lisa Hanna of the People's National Party (PNP), urged the United States in May 2022 to end the economic, financial, and trade blockade on Cuba, stating in a legislative session: “The Cuban people have already suffered enough; it is time for the world to put aside confrontation and strive to annul this type of sanctions, which are inconceivable and harmful...”¹⁴⁷

During the pandemic that affected the entire world, the “Cuban medical power” received aid from more than a hundred countries including Jamaica, a developing country whose population is less than a third of Cuba's.¹⁴⁸ Among the reported donations were several directed to Santiago de Cuba: two were from the government of Jamaica —one from 2021 consisted of syringes, needles, cannulas, masks and face shields, instruments for anaesthesia and disinfectants;¹⁴⁹ another one in October 2022 after Hurricane Ian arrived on a Jamaican coast guard vessel¹⁵⁰ with medical supplies and support

¹⁴⁴ A. Lewis, op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ “Jamaica-Cuba Friendship Association” seems to be the most active. See, for example, “Statement of the Jamaica-Cuba Friendship Association,” Cuba Minrex, Jan.16, 2025; “Jamaican solidarity takes a stand for Cuba,” Cuba Minrex, Jul. 26, 2022; “Statement of the Jamaica-Cuba Friendship Association on the decision of the U.S. government to impose sanctions on the beneficiary countries of the Cuban International Medical Collaboration,” Cuba Minrex, Mar. 6, 2025; “Jamaica stands firm against U.S. push to end Cuban doctors program,” *Wired JA*, Mar. 27, 2025; “Submission to the United Nations OHCHR Universal Periodic Review (second cycle) of human rights in Cuba, 16th session, May/June 2013,” Friends of Cuba (Jamaica), 6 Cheriton Road, Kingston 2, Jamaica. Tel. 876-759-8901-2. Email: paulburkeja@yahoo.com.

¹⁴⁶ As reported by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs; see “Solidarity with Cuba and from Cuba in 2022,” Havana, Cuba Minrex, Dec. 27, 2022. Also see “Cuba's outsized international presence,” op. cit.

¹⁴⁷ Elsy Fors Garzon, “Call in Jamaica to end the blockade against Cuba,” Kingston, *Prensa Latina*, May 11, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Cuba received at least 135 donations of medical goods and food, mostly from governments, international agencies and organizations, corporations and solidarity groups from 40 countries. (See: Daniella Pérez Muñoz, “Donation of medical supplies from Russia arrives in Cuba,” Havana, *Agencia Cubana de Noticias (ACN)*, Jan. 25, 2022; “Ministerio de Comercio Exterior ofrece detalles sobre las donaciones a Cuba durante la pandemia y cómo se canalizan,” *Granma*, Jul. 11, 2021; Freddy Pérez Cabrera, “Nuevas donaciones de países amigos llegan a Villa Clara,” Santa Clara, *Granma*, Sep.16, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ “Jamaican government on Sunday sent a medical supply donation to Santiago de Cuba province in order to fight the Covid-19 pandemic,” Santiago de Cuba, *Prensa Latina*, Aug. 2, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ HMJS Nanny of the Maroons de Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard. (“JDF welcomes ‘HMJS Nanny of the Maroons’ to maritime fleet,” *Jamaica Observer*, Jun. 27, 2020.

valued at \$20 million.¹⁵¹ In April 2025, Cuban health and educational collaborators, members of the Cuban mission in Kingston, and Jamaican businessmen donated 500 kilograms of medical supplies.¹⁵²

Jamaica and U.S. anti-trafficking efforts

The U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 requires the U.S. government to prepare an annual report on global trafficking in persons (TIP). This “TIP Report” is published annually since 2001 by a special office of the Department of State and provides an evaluation by country. From 2003 to 2014, Cuba was designated as a Tier 3 country (there are three levels from best to worst), which “does not fully meet minimum standards” and “does not make significant efforts” to combat trafficking. Until 2011, it was mainly designated as a country of origin for trafficking in minors (forced labor and sexual exploitation), but since then, the forced labor and withholding passports of medical professionals abroad has been included. In 2015, during the Obama administration’s normalization process with Cuba, Cuba was promoted to “Level 2 – Watch,” for “making significant efforts” to combat trafficking by reporting efforts to address sex trafficking and to amend the criminal code, including bringing it into conformity with the requirements of the 2000 UN TIP Protocol. Yet, it noted that the Government of Cuba “did not recognize forced labor as a problem within Cuba and did not report efforts to prevent forced labor.”¹⁵³ In 2019, Cuba was again downgraded to Level 3, where it has remained, and the forced labor of export workers, particularly of the medical missions, has been flagged with increasing emphasis. Starting with the 2022 TIP Report, eleven governments including Cuba were noted for state-sponsored trafficking policies or patterns,¹⁵⁴ a list in which Cuba has remained. In the 2024 TIP Report, released by the Biden administration, Cuba’s labour export programme was prominently highlighted trafficking as an issue of special interest¹⁵⁵ and Cuba Archive’s Executive Director, one of the authors of this report, was recognized for her work against trafficking in the medical brigades.¹⁵⁶

For its part, Jamaica has long been classified in the annual TIP Report as a Tier 2 country that “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so.” Since 2021, the Jamaica country page narrative has consistently referred to Cuba’s workers in the country; it reads: “According to press reports, the government contracted approximately 450 Cuban medical professionals during the year. Authorities did not acknowledge

¹⁵¹ Chris Patterson, “No Jamaican casualties from passage of Hurricane Ian,” *Jamaica Information Service*, Oct. 1, 2022.

¹⁵² Luis Alberto Portuondo and Indira Ferrer Alonso, “Desde Jamaica, insumos médicos para Santiago de Cuba,” Santiago de Cuba, *Granma*, Apr. 17, 2025.

¹⁵³ “Cuba: Tier 2 Watch List,” Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁵⁴ 2022 Trafficking in Persons Report, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁵⁵ 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Cuba, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁵⁶ “Heroes,” Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State.

their presence or provide information on measures taken to screen Cuban medical workers for trafficking indicators, despite ongoing concerns the Government of Cuba may have compelled some of them to work.”¹⁵⁷ The latest report, for 2024, reads: “Authorities did not acknowledge Cuban government-affiliated workers as being at high risk for forced labor or screen these workers for indicators of trafficking. ... Some Cuban government-affiliated workers in Jamaica, including medical and teaching professionals the government contracted, may have been forced to work by the Cuban government.”¹⁵⁸ Among the “Prioritized Recommendations” for Jamaica it calls for fully implementing the screening tools and NRM (National Referral Mechanism)¹⁵⁹ to increase proactive identification and referral of potential trafficking victims among vulnerable groups—to include Cuban government-affiliated workers in Jamaica ...— and provide consistent training for officials on implementing these tools.”

In 2023, Ambassador Quiñones Sánchez, accused the United States of waging a “very dirty campaign against Cuba” and said that Cuban doctors “have a salary in Cuba, they get 100 per cent of their salary. And they are also receiving a huge amount of money working wherever they are as part of the agreement signed with the Cuban Government. When they come to Jamaica it doesn’t mean they lose their job in Cuba. ... Cubans working in Jamaica have the benefit of bringing their family to vacation in Jamaica [paid for by the Cuban Government].”¹⁶⁰ According to many members of medical and educational brigades interviewed by Cuba Archive for the last 15 years—in service or after—the government has never paid for family visits in the countries where they have been allowed, a growing trend in the last ten years. The “enormous amounts of money” the Ambassador boasts of can only refer to the large payments made by host governments for the Cuban brigades, of which the workers effectively receive a minimal fraction.

On February 25th, 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced an expanded visa restriction policy “to apply to current or former Cuban government officials, and other individuals, including foreign government officials, who are believed to be responsible for, or involved in, the Cuban labor export program, particularly Cuba’s overseas medical missions” and applying to their immediate family members.¹⁶¹ The announcement resulted in a loud backlash, particularly from CARICOM (Caribbean Community) member countries.¹⁶² Many accused the Secretary of State of a

¹⁵⁷ “[Jamaica: Tier 2](#),” 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Jamaica, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁵⁸ “[Jamaica: Tier 2](#),” 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Jamaica, U.S. Department of State.

¹⁵⁹ The NRM is a “co-operative framework through which state actors fulfill their obligations to protect and promote the human rights of trafficked persons” and coordinate strategic partnerships with civil society toward this responsibility. (“Evaluation of National Referral Mechanisms,” DevTech Systems, Inc., Jul. 25, 2022 (citing “National Referral Mechanisms: Joining Efforts to Protect the Rights of Trafficked Persons – A Practical Handbook,” OSCE for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2004.

¹⁶⁰ A. Dunkley-Willis, “All lies,” op. cit.

¹⁶¹ Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, “Expansion of visa restrictions policy for individuals exploiting Cuban labor,” Press Statement, U.S. Department of State, Feb. 25, 2025.

¹⁶² Sarah Morland, “Defiant Caribbean leaders dismiss trafficking accusations as US targets Cuba's doctor diplomacy,” *Reuters*, Mar. 13, 2025.

bias against the Cuban government because he is the son of Cuban immigrants. The Jamaican newspaper *The Gleaner* published an editorial entitled "Leave the Cuban doctors" declared that Marco Rubio's plan was "callous, cruel and vindictive."¹⁶³ It said that that per thousand inhabitants, the rate of doctors in Cuba exceeds 5.9, while Jamaica's is 0.7, attributing the severe shortage of doctors and nurses to their recruitment in large numbers in the U.S. and other countries. The editorial failed to disclose the source for cited data on Cuba and, most importantly, ignored the glaring questions of why Jamaican health workers are leaving the country and why Cubans would be incentivized to fill those jobs.

On a tour of several Caribbean countries, Rubio paid an official visit to Jamaica and clarified that the U.S. is not opposed to providing medical assistance or to the work of Cuban doctors, but rather objects to violations of international labor standards inherent in the Cuban regime's cooperation program. He specified that the appropriation of wages and the confiscation of identification documents are part of a pattern of forced labor in the medical brigades.¹⁶⁴

Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness and Health and Welfare Minister Dr. Christopher Tufton responded by insisting that Cuban medical personnel are not exploited and "provide a valuable service in the public health system." Holness said: "We are, however, very careful not to exploit the Cuban doctors who are here. We ensure that they are treated within our labor laws and benefit like any other worker. ... So any characterization of the program by others certainly would not be applicable to Jamaica."¹⁶⁵ For her part, the head of the Cuban Medical Brigade in Jamaica, Katia Ochoa, thanked the Jamaican authorities for their forceful response to what she considered "attacks on health missions by the U.S. Secretary of State."¹⁶⁶ However, a Cuban health worker from Jamaica confidentially informed *CubaNet* that, "thanks to Marco Rubio," the brigade chiefs were ordered to give the collaborators their identity documents.¹⁶⁷ For his part, Minister of Health Tufton told the media¹⁶⁸ that Jamaica was in conversations and negotiations with Cuba and looking at the possibilities of change of the existing MOU, "to clarify issues" and maybe "adjust elements of the agreement," but that nothing had changed and the program was maintained.

Tufton also confirmed that there were around 400 Cuban health professionals in Jamaica, claiming not to know the exact number, of whom a third were surveyed, and that a team was going to Cuba to participate in the interviews to select incoming members of the Cuban mission. He indicated, when asked about the United States' concern, that they were looking for points of

¹⁶³ "Leave Cuban medics," Editorial, *The Gleaner*, Mar. 3, 2025.

¹⁶⁴ "Marco Rubio lanza advertencia contra uno de los negocios más lucrativos del régimen," *Cubanel*, Mar. 27, 2025; Luis Francisco Orozco, "Marco Rubio met with the Prime Minister of Jamaica to discuss security issues and the presence of Cuban doctors," *Voz* 3, Mar. 27, 2025.

¹⁶⁵ "Jamaica stands firm against U.S. push," op. cit.

¹⁶⁶ "Historias de humanismo y solidaridad," op. cit. (Translation from Spanish.)

¹⁶⁷ A. Grimal, "Trafficking of doctors in the Caribbean," op. cit.

¹⁶⁸ "Jamaica renegotiating Cuban medical mission MOU, Tufton says in update," *Our Today*/YouTube.

agreement with their main trading partner with whom they had a very beneficial traditional relationship. In June of 2025, Tufton reaffirmed that Jamaica's collaboration with Cuba will continue, as it has had "significant benefit over the years," adding: "I want to just say very clearly that we value the partnership with Cuba. We value their contribution; we currently have 88 Cuban doctors and 199 nurses here. I want to just recognise the initiatives and their efforts and, hopefully, we will continue to build on that." However, he indicated that the Ministry had started to explore long-term relationships in training and clinical exchanges with India, the Philippines and Nigeria.¹⁶⁹

Indeed, Jamaica must value its relationship with the United States. Since 2010, the U.S. has provided it assistance of many millions annually, including aid for cooperation in security, development, health, education, and disaster response—in 2022, it amounted to US\$65 million and in 2024, US\$48 million.¹⁷⁰ Given that money is fungible, in essence, the U.S. has been paying for Cuba's brigades to Jamaica.

Conclusions

Cuba-Jamaica cooperation constitutes institutionalized forced labor and is part of the Cuban dictatorship's huge business of modern slavery. The contracts, regulations, and practices to which Cuban collaborators are subjected reveal their systematic exploitation by the Cuban regime through salary confiscation, document retention, movement constraints, excessive work schedules, arbitrary restrictions, vigilance, threats, and tyrannical discipline that includes legal punishments. Members of both the medical and educational brigade in Jamaica have borne witness, independently from one another, to the misery they are subjected to in totalitarian Cuba, which moves them to accept internationalist missions. They have related the control that Cuban authorities exert over them in Jamaica, where they must transfer most of their wages to the Cuban government, lack healthcare and medical or legal insurance and adequate living conditions, and, in some cases, are subjected to dangerous environments.

The government of Jamaica signs agreements that illustrate complicity in the labor trafficking by accepting Cuba's disciplinary authority over the members of the Cuban mission and agreeing to not hire any who abandon their post. It is hard to reconcile their alleged ignorance of the coercion exerted on the Cuban workers to transfer to the Cuban government a large part of the salaries Jamaica pays them. Certainly, they must not ignore that a \$200 monthly stipend is grossly insufficient to secure adequate housing.

¹⁶⁹ Latonya Linton, "Partnership with Cuba will continue – Health Minister," Jamaica Information Service, Jun. 11, 2025.

¹⁷⁰ "Jamaica," [ForeignAssistance.gov](https://www.foreignassistance.gov), data last updated on: 6/13/2025.

The high degree of secrecy and lack of public accountability on the costs and other aspects of the collaboration undermine its transparency and credibility. Furthermore, the reported achievements of both medical and educational missions are unverified, unsupported by independent audits. Finally, the ideological content promoted by the Cuban educational brigade is evidence of a proselytist approach in classrooms all over Jamaica, even among very young students, in favor of the Cuban dictatorship, its socialist-revolutionary model, and its historical leaders.

Meanwhile, the Cuban government does not invest the export earnings from medical and educational personnel in Cuba's health and education systems, and the export of medical and educational workers is happening in a context of deep crisis in these sectors and a large deficit of doctors and teachers. The needs of the Cuban population are disregarded to privilege revenues to sustain a dictatorship. Jamaica's leaders, who represent a civilized democracy, should stop enabling this shameful and illegal practice.

Recommendations

The Jamaica-Cuba collaboration demands total transparency, particularly in sectors as sensitive as health and education, and not only surrounding the rights of Cuban workers or Jamaican patients or students, but also to coherently assess the interests of the citizens of both countries as well as national and regional security. The government and civil society of Jamaica should examine the evidence presented in this report and carefully review all agreements, memoranda, annexes, documents, work permits, expense reports, receipts, credentials and functions of the Cuban worker, and everything related to the Cuban brigades.

In order to properly assess if Cuban workers in Jamaica are victims of forced labour/human trafficking, their working and living conditions must be verified. Cuba Archive recommends using its comprehensive guide tailored to recognizing the characteristics of the internationalist brigades,¹⁷¹ given that Cuba has perfected a sophisticated scheme of exploitation of its export labor force that is difficult to imagine if one has not been its victim or direct participant. Cuban workers on medical and educational missions should be interviewed by Jamaican authorities in the presence of credible international observers, such as experts on trafficking in persons and jurists of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, guaranteeing them their current jobs and granting them residence or asylum if they request it.

If Jamaica needs the Cuban workers, they should be hired directly and competitively, treated on an equal basis with other workers and in accordance with Jamaican and international law. Entities

¹⁷¹ Recommendations for assessing whether Cuban workers abroad are victims of forced labor/human trafficking, [Cuba Archive](#)

and representatives of the Cuban dictatorship have no justifiable role in that labor relationship, in immigration or any other matters, and in no way should intervene or serve as intermediary.

The U.S. government stands out for denouncing the trafficking of Cuban export workers — it should effectively implement measures in accordance with the Trafficking in Persons Victims Act and other pertinent U.S. laws. Jamaica's ranking in the annual TIP Report should be downgraded from Tier 2 to 3 to accurately reflect its government's involvement in trafficking and complicit Jamaican and Cuban officials should be sanctioned with visa restrictions. Aid to Jamaica should be conditional on the cessation of the trafficking.

Report prepared by Maria C. Werlan and Annarela Grimal.

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