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January 27, 2020

Mr. Martin Baron

Executive Editor

The Washington Post

Dear Mr. Baron,

Rachelle Krygier’s “The U.S. is pushing Latin American allies to send their Cuban doctors packing” (1/21) is a very troubling piece, especially by such a prestigious publication as *The Washington Post*. It contains glaring errors, whitewashes egregious human rights’ abuses, and offends governments that moved to end exploitation and protect their national interests. Failing to cite a single formerly indentured Cuban doctor, it parrots propaganda by officials and apologists of the Cuban dictatorship and blames the end of Cuba’s medical missions in four countries on a Trump Administration-backed “conservative backlash” depriving the world’s poor of healthcare. It cites me out of context and ignores substantial fact-based information I sent her as she was working on it.

The following inaccuracies should be corrected:

First, Ms. Krygier states that “in late 2018, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro canceled a $200 million annual agreement” that sent thousands of Cuban doctors to underserved areas of Brazil. The Cuban medical mission was actually costing Brazil around twice as much and it was Cubathat abruptly withdrew its entire medical contingent before Bolsonaro assumed the presidency. The president-elect had promised during his campaign to hire the Cuban doctors directly, as Cuba was keeping 80% of their pay and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) another 5%. 836 doctors of the 8,471 recalled doctors refused to return to Cuba, joining another 1,000 plus who had abandoned the program earlier. President Bolsonaro later reported that agents posing as doctors had been organizing radical groups for “terrorist activities.” The so-called “health collaboration” has by now been demonstrably linked to the uncreditworthy, corruption-ridden, and politically-driven $682 billion in loans (now in moratorium) for the Mariel Port in Cuba, disbursed by Brazil under the presidency of Cuban ally Dilma Rousseff.

Second,Ms. Krygier states that “Cuba recalled 700 doctors from Bolivia after the resignation of socialist President Evo Morales.” In fact, the new government of Bolivia asked the Cuban medical mission to leave after some of its 702 members —only 205 were actually represented as doctors— were caught funding violence to help Morales steal the election. Many had reportedly been carrying out intelligence activities to support his authoritarian government. Bolivian authorities reported that Cuba had been keeping 80% of the wages that Bolivia had been paying for the workers.

Third,Ms. Krygier reports that Ecuadoran President Lenín Moreno “sent 400 doctors home in November, in the midst of protests against austerity, and suggested that some of them might have been inciting violence.” Cuban agents embedded in the medical mission were actually found coordinating violent mobs —far worse than “protests” — that shook the country.The Dean of the

Medical School of Ecuador’s International University explained that the Cuban medical mission had purely political motives and that the health workers were being exploited and; Cuba had been keeping 80% of Ecuador’s payments for their services. The country’s Anti-Corruption Minister recently reported that at least six Cuban doctors were being investigated for presenting false credentials issued by the University of Havana.

Fourth, Ms. Krygier claims that “Cuba canceled the program in El Salvador in April, after accusations that doctors were performing surgeries without legal authorization.” In fact, El Salvador’s government medical watchdog, *Junta de Vigilancia de la Profesión Médica*, rescinded authorization for the doctors, as their qualifications had not been verified by a previous government, allied to Cuba. I have interviewed several Cuban health professionals who were assigned to provide healthcare, including surgeries, for which they lacked qualifications. El Salvador Medical Association had also long denounced the agreement that provided the Cuban doctors far more benefits than local doctors receive.

The governments of the above-cited countries took measures to protect their national interests, ended a politically-driven and expensive exploitation scheme funding Cuba’s 61-year dictatorship, and instead moved to abide by international law that forbids human trafficking. The now-unveiled secret agreements Cuba had with its former allies are evidence of grave irregularities and abuses. Furthermore, thousands of Cuban health workers have braved severe reprisals and packed their own meager belongings to flee exploitation in scores of these missions all over the world. As punishment, Cuba will not allow them entry for at least eight years —not even to see the spouses, children, or parents they were forced to leave behind— and they have lost considerable accumulated pay withheld by the government.

Ms. Krygier directs her blame towards “tightening U.S. sanctions” that “isolate” Cuba, ignoring $7 billion a year in remittances and other assistance plus hundreds of millions of dollars in travel and other exempted activities from the U.S. embargo. Moreover, she writes that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo “has called” Cuba’s international medical program “a form of slavery and human trafficking,” failing to note that our government is directed to combat global human trafficking by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, passed by Congress in 2000 and signed by President Clinton. The Department of State’s [Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_to_Monitor_and_Combat_Trafficking_in_Persons)’ annual report designates Cuba a Tier 3 country that “fails to comply with minimum standards to prevent trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so.”

Ms. Krygier gives ample space to the propagandistic claims by officials from the Cuban regime —which represses all fundamentals freedoms— and one of its legendary apologists. She does mention an official inquiry to Cuba of last November, that I sent her, by the U.N. Human Rights Council’s Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (as well as the Rapporteur on Trafficking, not mentioned in the article). Yet, she follows with Cuba’s unquestioned denial and claims of “altruism, humanism, and international solidarity.” Regarding the abuses cited in the inquiry and from comprehensive information I sent her, Ms. Krygier quickly dismisses the plight of around 18,384 doctors currently working for Cuba in over 60 countries with this statement: “Doctors have said they are paid little and must leave their families behind in Cuba so they don’t defect.” She does not cite a single voice of the many thousands who’ve fled their missions —many are willing to provide first-hand testimony of their ordeals. She also fails to mention other documented problems with the “humanitarian” project, such as grossly manipulated statistics, questionable medical qualifications, and the lacking recourse most patients have for medical negligence.

Ms. Krygier overlooks critical aspects of Cuban reality, including that its Communist military regime guarantees a huge pool of captive workers for exploitation, including doctors earning around $67 a month. Could she ignore that it is Cuba’s parasitic and technically-bankrupt socialist economy, not the U.S. embargo, what produces mass misery (but extreme privileges for a tiny ruling elite)?

Finally, Ms. Krygier cited in one line our half-hour conversation to seemingly echo her “blame-Trump’s U.S.” thesis. She elicited my words by asking verbatim if I agreed that ending medical missions in Latin America was “an important blow for Cuba’s dual purpose of income and influence.” Obviously it is but my response was expressed in a very different context. Further, she misspelled my last name, which remains uncorrected despite my request days ago.

Many of the comments to Ms. Krygier’s article posted online denote how the disinformation effectively shapes public opinion, as *The Washington* *Post* readers have written about “right-wing ideology overcoming all humane considerations,” … “patients deprived of care in poor countries,” … “a GOP beholden to the small group of Cuban expats in Florida,” and “the US and the world sicker because of Trump and his cultists.” Fortunately, the dark picture of Cuba’s money-making enterprise and political weapon in “humanitarian” disguise is finally coming to light despite decades of ideologically-driven and shoddy journalism obliging a criminal dictatorship.

We hope that *The Washington Post* will correct this unbalanced and regrettable piece, in fairness to thousands of human beings who have suffered this ignominy and to the governments that have moved to protect them.

Attached please find the comprehensive report on the trafficking of Cuban medical workers I provided Ms. Krygier with additional material.

Respectfully yours,

Maria C. Werlau

Executive Director

Cuba Archive

Enclosure: Submission to the U.S. Department of State’s [Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_to_Monitor_and_Combat_Trafficking_in_Persons).

C: Cameron Barr, Managing Editor

Douglas Jehl, Foreign Editor

Rachelle Krygier

*(Sent by email to: Martin Baron, Executive Editor, martin.baron@washpost.com and to cameron.barr@washpost.com, douglas.jehl@washpost.com, and rachellekrygier@gmail.com.)*

**Letter to the editor**

**Sent by email Jan. 26. 2020 to letters@washpost.com**

Rachelle Krygier’s “The U.S. is pushing Latin American allies to send their Cuban doctors packing” (1/21), has glaring errors, whitewashes egregious human rights’ abuses, and offends governments ending exploitation and protecting their national interests. It cites not a single formerly indentured Cuban doctor, parrots propaganda by officials and apologists of the Cuban dictatorship, and blames the U.S. government for depriving the world’s poor of healthcare. It cites me out of context and ignored substantial fact-based information I sent her.

To correct inaccuracies in the piece: 1. Cuba abruptly withdrew its 8,471 doctors from Brazil, costing much more than $200 million a year, before Bolsonaro assumed the presidency; he had promised to hire the doctors directly. 2. The incoming government of Bolivia asked the Cuban medical mission to leave after some of its 702 members (only 205 were doctors) were caught funding violence to help Morales steal the election. 3. Ecuador sent the Cuban doctors home when agents embedded in the medical mission were found coordinating violent attacks. 4. El Salvador rescinded legal authorization for Cuban doctors performing eye surgeries whose qualifications had not been verified.

International law forbids human trafficking and U.S. law combats it. Cuba’s medical missions were sent packing for illegalities and exploitation that thousands of Cuban doctors have denounced and many have escaped.

Maria C. Werlau

Executive Director

Cuba Archive