



## World Health Organization approval for Cuba's COVID vaccines would greatly strengthen the Cuban dictatorship

By Maria C. Werlau

January 28, 2022 - Updated Feb. 4, 2022

Based on ongoing research of Cuba's local production of five COVID vaccine candidates, there appears to be a good chance that:

- Cuba will obtain emergency approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) for at least one and up to three of its vaccines; and
- if approval is granted, the number of potential buyers ready or willing to purchase these vaccines will probably grow considerably.

High-volume COVID vaccine exports would greatly strengthen the Cuban dictatorship.

The above conclusions are based on the following.

### **1. It is highly likely that Cuba will obtain approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) for at least one and up to three of its COVID vaccine candidates.**

Only ten COVID vaccines have to date achieved approval by WHO.<sup>1</sup> Since 2020, Cuba has been working on five vaccines candidates and has initiated the process for WHO “prequalification status” approval. Cuba's Director of Science and Innovation for BioCubaFarma, the Cuban state's biopharmaceutical conglomerate, said at a conference in Havana last January 25<sup>th</sup> that WHO approval for emergency use was expected “this year” for the Abdala vaccine. Cuba has reported that this takes WHO two to three months after receiving all the required documentation, which it planned to provide WHO by early February.<sup>2</sup> It is unclear how far along the different vaccine candidates are in WHO's approval process, as information in official Cuban media is sparing and contradictory, so a sudden announcement much sooner than expected would be in line with Cuba's usual modus operandi.

Cuba has a biotechnology industry that already produces ten vaccines<sup>3</sup> for export and claims that 3 of 5 of its vaccines candidates —named Abdala, Soberana 02, and Soberana Plus— are over 90% effective. Cuba's Ministry of Health reports that it has already applied 33.9 million doses of the Abdala and two Soberana vaccines on the Cuban population of 11 million as of January 26, 2022.<sup>4</sup> Three doses are required for “full vaccination” and the reported vaccination rate is 93% (for a fully vaccinated rate of 86.7%) as of 1/25/2022.

---

<sup>1</sup> “10 Vaccines Approved for Use by WHO,” <https://covid19.trackvaccines.org/agency/who/>

<sup>2</sup> “Cuba pledges “life-saving package” of Covid-19 vaccine support for the Global South at Progressive International press conference,” *Pressenza*, Jan. 27, 2022, <https://www.pressenza.com/2022/01/cuba-pledges-life-saving-package-of-covid-19-vaccine-support-for-the-global-south-at-progressive-international-press-conference/>.

<sup>3</sup> “Cuba aspira a exportar fármacos genéricos por \$220 millones,” *Agence France Presse / El Nuevo Herald*, Nov. 18, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> “Actualización de la Estrategia Para El Desarrollo De Las Vacunas Cubanas,” Ministerio de Salud de Cuba, MINSAP, <https://salud.msp.gob.cu/actualizacion-de-la-vacunacion-en-el-marco-de-los-estudios-de-los-candidatos-vacunales-cubanos-y-la-intervencion-sanitaria/>.

Millions of more doses have been produced for local consumption and sold to countries that have granted emergency approval to the Cuban vaccines: Iran, Vietnam,<sup>5</sup> Venezuela, Nicaragua, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines. Iran is also producing Soberana 02 under an agreement with Cuba.

Approval seems likely forthcoming because:

a.) WHO is favorably inclined to supporting Cuba.

PAHO and WHO have amply and openly supported the Cuban regime for decades and have promoted its international medical missions and other export health services, uncritically reported Cuba's so-called achievements in health and lifestyle without questioning the reliability of official data, strongly supported the local biotechnology industry,<sup>6</sup> and praised Cuba's production of COVID vaccines. Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence has worked successfully for decades to penetrate and influence PAHO (Pan American Health Organization) as well as WHO.

b.) Cuba has invested heavily and secured considerable funding for the vaccines' production.

The Central American Economic Integration Bank (BICE) recently approved a loan for 46.7 million euros for Cuba to improve its capacity to produce 200 million COVID vaccines.<sup>7</sup> France has provided assistance of \$24.4 million to Cuba in the last two years to improve laboratory facilities, reactive substances, and transportation equipment.<sup>8</sup> In November 2020, the Swiss NGO MediCuba, which receives funds from Switzerland's Cooperation Agency, reported in November 2020 that it had already donated \$600 thousand to Cuba for diagnostic tests and other equipment and would be making a donation of an undisclosed amount to Cuba's Finlay Institute for the production of the COVID vaccine.<sup>9</sup> Additional assistance has likely been received from allies and other sources.

Cuba has been able to divert its resources to vaccine development by securing, as per official information, 135 donations particularly of medical supplies and food from 40 nations in 2021 alone.<sup>10</sup> It currently reports more than 400 international cooperation projects from more than 30 countries, 54 non-governmental organizations and solidarity associations, and more than 64 research centers and universities registered in Cuba.

c.) Cuba has consolidated an international perception that it is a pioneer in COVID vaccine development, with PAHO/WHO support.

Cuba refused Covax<sup>11</sup> assistance (free or subsidized COVID vaccines) and has mostly vaccinated the local population with its locally-produced vaccine candidates, starting prior to completion of standard

---

<sup>5</sup> "Vietnam to buy 10 million Cuban vaccine doses," *France 24*, Sep. 20, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, "Cuban Experience with Local Production of Medicines, Technology Transfer and Improving Access to Health." World Health Organization, Pan American Health Organization, and European Commission. 2015, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/336685>.

<sup>7</sup> "Aprueba financiamiento a Cuba el BCIE para apoyar el combate a la COVID-19," *Granma*, Jan. 11, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> "Francia y UE donan más de cinco millones de euros al Gobierno de Cuba para investigación en salud," *La Habana*, Diario de Cuba, 10 Dic 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Rodríguez, "Suiza apoyará desarrollo de vacuna cubana contra COVID-19," *La Habana*, *Associated Press*, November 13, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Daniella Pérez Muñoz, "Llega a Cuba donativo de insumos médicos procedente de Rusia," *La Habana*, Agencia Cubana de Noticias, 25 de enero de 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Covax is the Covid vaccine initiative of the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), an international organization Created in 2000 that brings together public and private sectors to increase equitable and sustainable use of vaccines. Gavi has a 28-member Board of Directors in which UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation hold permanent seats and representatives of other Gavi partners serve on time-limited basis. See more at <https://www.gavi.org>.

trials. While Cuba is actually the country with perhaps the lowest vaccination rate in the world (it has had minimal vaccination with WHO approved Chinese vaccines), it is being widely reported as the country with the third highest rate of vaccination (due to high vaccination with local unapproved vaccine candidates).<sup>12</sup> To date, no international health organization or government corrected the misperception.

## 2. Cuba has lined up a number of potential buyers to purchase the vaccines.

The Cuban government had announced “advanced plans to supply 200 million doses of domestically produced Covid-19 vaccine to the Global South”<sup>13</sup> and that it is currently negotiating shipments of its COVID vaccines to 15 countries.<sup>14</sup> The Director General of the Finlay Vaccine Institute, which produces the Soberana vaccines, has said that “120 million doses could be produced in a single year.”<sup>15</sup> By June 2021, Cuba had reported to the media contacts with thirty countries to sell them the vaccines.<sup>16</sup> The named interested parties were mostly close political allies including Mexico, Argentina but countries like Ukraine and Paraguay were also mentioned.<sup>17</sup>

Cuba also plans to authorize “technology transfer” for production in third countries and offer its medical brigades “to build medical capacity and training for vaccine delivery in partner countries.”<sup>18</sup>

Organizations friendly to Cuba, such as UNICEF and PAHO, will likely purchase Cuba’s vaccines for the COVAX global vaccine procurement initiative aimed at ensuring subsidized vaccines for poor nations, which requires WHO approval. They will justify the purchase based on rewarding the first vaccine produced in Latin America and the Caribbean and “not by a member of the G20.”<sup>19</sup> COVAX has reportedly repeatedly fallen short of its targets and in September 2021 announced a 25% reduction in its planned vaccine supply by 2021.<sup>20</sup> Because Cuba’s vaccines are protein subunit vaccines based on protein antigens that do not require freezing temperature and could reportedly last for weeks at room temperature; this facilitates their production at large scale and easy storage, which is especially attractive to tropical countries.<sup>21</sup> Cuba also plans to offer its vaccines at “solidarity pricing” to low-income countries.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>.

<sup>13</sup> “Cuba pledges “life-saving package,” op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> According to Rolando Pérez Rodríguez, Cuba’s Director of Science and Innovation for BioCubaFarma, the Cuban state’s biopharmaceutical conglomerate. (“Cuba espera que la OMS apruebe “este año” una de sus vacunas contra la covid,” La Habana, *EFE/SwissInfo.ch*, 25 enero 2022.)

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>16</sup> “Paraguay solicita la compra de dosis,” op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> “El Gobierno cubano ofrece a Ucrania sus candidatos vacunales anticovid 'a precios competitivos,’” *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 8, 2021; “Paraguay solicita la compra de dosis de los candidatos vacunales cubanos contra el Covid-19,” *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 16, 2021; “Argentina negociaría pagar los candidatos vacunales cubanos con un crédito que La Habana le debe desde 1973,” Buenos Aires, *Diario de Cuba*, Jun. 12, 2021. “Cuba willing to cooperate with Vietnam in Covid-19 vaccine supply,” VNA, Jun. 17, 2021; <https://sggpnews.org.vn/international/cuba-willing-to-cooperate-with-vietnam-in-covid19-vaccine-supply-92866.html>.

<sup>18</sup> “Cuba pledges “life-saving package,” op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> “Cuba busca el reconocimiento de la OMS a sus vacunas contra COVID-19,” La Habana, *EFE/El Nuevo Herald*, 1 de enero de 2022. (Translation from Spanish.)

<sup>20</sup> “Cuba pledges “life-saving package,” op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Cuba’s protein subunit vaccines are made up of a synthetic fraction of the SARS-CoV-2 protein S, the so-called RBD (receptor binding domain). (“Cuba pledges “life-saving package,” op. cit.; “Qué se sabe de las vacunas de la covid desarrolladas en Cuba,” Vacunas AEP, May 17, 2021, <https://vacunasaep.org/profesionales/noticias/covid-19-vacunas-investigadas-en-cuba>.)

<sup>22</sup> “Cuba pledges “life-saving package,” op. cit.

Cuba's gigantic apparatus for intelligence, propaganda, and influence has been very effective in eliciting international support for the regime despite its pervasive and systematic human rights' abuses and bankrupt economy. Since 2020, it has embarked on a huge marketing campaign to offer its cheap vaccines-in-development to poorer nations, "pushed aside by bigger, wealthier nations,"<sup>23</sup> that "can't afford to vaccinate their populations at the high prices demanded by Big Pharma."<sup>24</sup> Cuban diplomats, health authorities, and the entire government machinery have been working feverishly and with the assistance of its extensive "solidarity networks" and agents all over the world to line up buyers for Cuba's COVID vaccines. They ably coopt and manipulate scholarly publications, media coverage, and public opinion. More pieces are sure to come along the lines of CNBC's recent article titled "Why Cuba's extraordinary Covid vaccine success could provide the best hope for low-income countries."<sup>25</sup>

To cite one example of how Cuba mobilizes influential people to advance its interests, a group of 26 French deputies has just sent a letter to Prime Minister Jean Castex urging their government to authorize the use of Cuban COVID vaccines, especially in overseas territories "that request it."<sup>26/27</sup> This so-called "request" is the same justification used to send 58 emergency medical brigades to 42 countries since the pandemic (the latest one to Bahamas this January)<sup>28</sup> despite the demise of Cuba's health system and the reported human trafficking the practice entails. (Cuba is charging thousands of dollars a month per health worker --the amount depends on the country-- while paying the workers an average of just 10-20% of that amount.)

As soon as any of Cuba's vaccines have a stamp of approval, many of Cuba's allies and friends will likely purchase it. It really does not matter how effective the vaccine might be. Cuba has many agents and allies within governments that do its bidding. This was already seen with the purchase by many nations of Cuba's interferon alpha 2b, touted as a miracle drug against COVID, that disappeared from the media hype as it proved ineffective (at best).<sup>29</sup>

### 3. High-volume COVID vaccine exports would greatly strengthen the Cuban dictatorship.

The 2021 vaccine market is projected to max out at \$67 billion and 2022 will see this drop to \$61 billion;<sup>30</sup> it is very competitive and prices vary widely. In 2021, for instance, South Africa purchased 1.5 million doses of the Oxford and AstraZeneca vaccine for use among health workers at a cost of \$5.25 (£3.84; €4.32) a dose, while the European Union was paying at \$2.15.<sup>31</sup> New COVID vaccines are also coming into the market such as one from a no-profit initiative of Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine, which secured emergency use authorization in India in December 2021 and is geared for deployment in underserved countries.<sup>32</sup> So, Cuba might arrive late to the party, however, the value of its political clout with many allies and friendly governments ought not to be underestimated.

---

<sup>23</sup> A. Faiola and A. Herrero, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> "Ian Powell," *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> "Why Cuba's extraordinary Covid vaccine success could provide the best hope for low-income countries,"

CNBC.com, Jan. 13 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/13/why-cubas-extraordinary-covid-vaccine-success-could-provide-the-best-hope-for-the-global-south.html>

<sup>26</sup> "Piden al Gobierno de Francia autorizar vacunas cubanas," *Granma*, Jan. 26, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> The French overseas territory of Martinique hosted one such COVID brigade, whose doctors earned less than the janitors at the hospital they worked at. (See Claire Meynial, "Le mystère des médecins cubains," *LePointe.fr*, Jul. 9, 2020.)

<sup>28</sup> "Brigada de enfermeros cubanos llega a Bahamas," *OnCuba.com*, Jan. 16, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> See Maria C. Werlau, "Cuba in the time of coronavirus: exploiting a global crisis, Part III. Interferon, Cuba's so-called "wonder drug" for COVID-19," *Cuba Archive.org*, May 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Terry, "Comparing COVID-19 vaccines: timelines, types and prices," *BioSpace.com*, Dec 14, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> "Price check: nations pay wildly different prices for vaccines," *NPR.org*, Feb. 19, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> "Texas Children's Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine COVID-19 vaccine technology secures emergency use authorization in India," *Houston, texaschildrens.org*, Dec. 28, 2021, <https://www.texaschildrens.org>

The Cuban government has said it could produce 120 million doses a year of Soberana and 200 million doses overall (it is not clear if this means in general or only if Abdala were also approved). If this is accurate, at a \$5 per dose rate (more than double what bulk purchases of Astra Zeneca have cost), it could generate gross annual revenues of \$600 million to \$1 billion. Increased production capacity and/or sales at higher per dose rates would multiply revenues, especially if more third country technology transfer production, such as Iran's, is authorized. Moreover, if Cuba manages to send more medical brigades as part of the vaccine package, export service revenues would increase as well as other support services such as storage and transportation.

Net revenues are difficult to estimate with existing data, but Cuba appears to have a competitive edge in production due to very low costs (personnel is paid very low wages, quality control is not up to par, and the state-run apparatus operates with minimal regulatory overhead). Moreover, the Cuban government is receiving considerable assistance from other governments for vaccine production. However, local production could be impaired by its limited access to capital markets, severe cash flow crunch (it has had historic difficulties paying for raw material for its pharmaceutical industry), and weak infrastructure (energy, water, roads, ports, etc.). As a result, it would likely have to rely on prepaid purchases from its allies and from the Global Vaccine Alliance's Covax program in collaboration with WHO/PAHO and UNICEF.

COVID vaccine and associated exports would not be enough to ultimately rescue the Cuban economy, but they would:

- 1) generate a flood of revenues for Cuba and increase employment in the biotechnology field;
- 2) allow Cuba to develop new partnerships in biotechnology —increasing Cuba's ties and influence with these partners— and improve prospects for the biopharmaceutical industry's export products and overall growth;
- 3) expand Cuba's international medical brigades, increasing service export revenues and bolstering 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism with an effective populist tool that, in addition, helps masquerade clandestine deployments of Cuban intelligence, security, and military personnel;
- 4) boost Cuba's international image and consolidate its fake “medical powerhouse” aura with a propaganda campaign based on “Cuba's unique model of vaccine internationalism;”
- 5) defuse local demands for structural economic reforms that would improve the lives of the Cuban people, postponing the ultimate reckoning of a failed system;
- 6) neutralize the negative consequences of the Cuban dictatorship's systematic human rights' abuses and failed economy/system, weakening the pro-democracy struggle.

-----  
*The author, Maria C. Werlau, is Executive Director of Cuba Archive. See Cuba Archive's publications on healthcare at CubaSalud.org (English and Spanish pages).*



[www.CubaArchive.org](http://www.CubaArchive.org)  
 Free Society Project, Inc.

Reproduction or distribution of this material  
 is authorized as long as its source is cited.

---

children%E2%80%99s-hospital-and-baylor-college-medicine-covid-19-vaccine-technology-secures-emergency.