



SHOCKING TESTIMONY ABOUT THE CUBAN MISSION TO BOLIVIA

August 5, 2025

Introduction

Bolivia will hold a presidential election on August 17 after nearly two decades of eroding freedoms under Bolivarianism—21st Century Socialism—since Evo Morales of the MAS party (Movement Toward Socialism) was elected president in 2006. In November 2019, Morales resigned amid a political crisis and allegations of electoral fraud. Jeanine Áñez, the second vice president of the Senate, assumed a transitional mandate for twelve months. Her interim government ordered the immediate departure of 725 alleged members of the Cuban medical brigade, citing evidence that many were engaged in political and security activities, including coordinating violent protests. In October 2020, Luis Arce, the MAS candidate, was elected president and reinstated the Bolivarian project. Áñez was arrested in March 2021 and sentenced to ten years in prison until 2022. She faces at least nine additional legal proceedings. It is currently unknown whether a Cuban medical brigade has returned to Bolivia.

The following is a testimony received by Cuba Archive on April 19, 2025, lightly edited for style and clarity¹. Certain details (marked with xxxxxxxx) have been redacted to protect the author's identity and prevent reprisals by the Cuban government. Much of the testimony aligns with statements by other members of the Bolivia mission and reports from Bolivian media.

Testimony of a Cuban Doctor

I served in Bolivia as a doctor with the Cuban mission from xxxxx to xxxxx (several years). I'm a xxxxxx (specialist doctor) and worked at the "El Alto" Ophthalmological Center in La Paz. Before being selected, I tried multiple times to join a mission, but each time, after spending weeks at the UCCM located at the CUJAE in Havana,² I was rejected. They claimed, according to Immigration, that I was a potential emigrant because I had a passport.³ Additionally, I was not a member of the

¹ Phone interview and text messages with Maria Werlau, August 3, 2025.

² The UCCM is the Central Unit for Medical Cooperation, headquartered at the José Antonio Echeverría Technological University in Havana. Persons selected to participate in an international mission reside there as a group, sharing overcrowded common spaces, in order to be processed and instructed before departing to their assigned country.

³ Seeking to emigrate to Spain, the author had previously obtained a regular blue passport, but had been denied authorization to leave. The regular passport can be used for normal travel. Internationalist personnel are

UJC or the PCC,⁴ as I had refused to join. To expedite selection, many paid between 400 and 600 CUC. It is well known that mission placements can be bought— even cafeteria administrators are sent as “medical technicians.”

Upon arrival in Bolivia, immediately after disembarking the plane, someone from State Security collected our passports. For those needing a connecting flight, the passport was briefly returned with the ticket and then taken again upon arrival at the final destination.



*First group of the 224 medical professionals who arrived Cuba from Bolivia after being expelled.
Foto: Escambray.cu/ Agencia Cubana de Noticias, Nov. 17, 2019.*

We were forbidden from forming emotional or friendly ties with locals, visiting their homes, or doing anything without prior approval. At the clinic I worked at as a xxxxxx (specialist doctor), I was required to see at least 35 patients daily; in reality, I saw only 3 to 8. The rest were fabricated. We created fake patient records to justify the presence of many Cubans listed as medical staff who had no connection to healthcare.

The mission coordinators —there were several— lived in enormous mansions in La Paz’s most luxurious areas, surrounded by Cuban security. Each had an entourage of friends and relatives brought from Cuba. They had private cooks, drivers, bodyguards, maids, and secretaries, all registered as “doctors.” Additionally, some were sent to manage the electric generating system under the guise of supporting the country’s infrastructure —despite Bolivia not experiencing blackouts. These

issued an official passport, which is red, that is only valid for travel for an authorized purpose in the authorized country.

⁴ The UJC (Union of Young Communists) is a highly selective Cuban state organization for youth aged 14 to 30 with proven political discipline and background, selected through a formal process. Membership in the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) is granted after an exhaustive investigation of the candidates (who are invited to join) based on their political behavior and ideological commitment; many come from the UJC.

personnel included members of the PCC, state unions,⁵ State Security, and Ministries of Economy and Planning, as well as family members (spouses, children, and even lovers) of the coordinators. One time, we were given a brochure at an official event stating there were over 700 “Cuban collaborators” in Bolivia, fewer than 300 of whom were medical staff. I knew most were political appointees.

We had to invent patients and justify the money Cuba was extracting from Bolivia for all of them. Surgeries for nonexistent patients were reported. What’s worse, unnecessary eye surgeries were conducted to boost the statistics. Pterygium surgeries were often unnecessary, and some cataract cases were made up. Nurses were often ordered to break insulin syringes and place the pieces in separate containers to pretend they had been used. Boxes of prescription glasses were broken, burned, or given away to create a record of distribution to fake patients. Painkillers like paracetamol and diclofenac were thrown away to support falsified records. All of this was fabricated to request additional funding and produce propaganda.

We were also handed a script for media interviews with *Prensa Latina*, which I refused to recite.

On one occasion, I saw a payroll document indicating that Bolivia was paying close to US\$4,000 per Cuban staff member. We received only US\$670—though our contracts stated we would get approximately US\$800, depending on exchange rates. From the US\$670, US\$100 was deducted for rent and utilities, which I later learned were covered by the Bolivian government. Apparently, the mission leaders were pocketing our rent deductions, as we lived in groups in houses provided to Cuba under the bilateral agreement.

Together with other collaborators, I witnessed the Cuban ambassador, Benigno Pérez Fernández,⁶ having large wooden crates—over a meter tall—loaded onto flights to Cuba under the label “Diplomatic Pouch.” Meanwhile, we were restricted to 40 pounds of luggage when traveling home. Flight crews mocked us for wearing layers of clothes just to carry more. Sometimes, flights were half-empty but loaded with goods for the elite. Once, they didn’t even load our limited luggage.

Oftentimes we went unpaid for four or five months, allegedly because Bolivia lacked funds, so we faced extremely harsh conditions. Some stores not aligned with Evo Morales’ government let us take food on credit. Without their help, we could not have survived.

⁵ Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) is the only union allowed in Cuba. The mass organization is subordinate to the Communist Party of Cuba and encompasses all Cuban unions by branch or sector.

⁶ Benigno Pérez Fernández was Cuba’s ambassador to Bolivia from October 2014 to February 2019.

Ambassador Benigno, mission chief Pavel Noa, and high-ranking officials such as Elizabeth Leiva were close friends with Dr. Fernando Leanes, the Argentine PAHO/WHO⁷ representative who regularly visited our clinic. President Evo Morales and his family received care there, and he visited often. Leanes relished the spotlight and photos with Evo. He was fully aware of our working conditions and the abuses we suffered, he knew that we were controlled and treated like slaves.



Dr. Fernando Leanes. Corte de foto cortesía del médico cubano que la tomó en Bolivia.

Like all specialist doctors, I was subject to "regulation" (a travel ban), but I managed to emigrate (details omitted to protect my family). I didn't abandon the mission while in Bolivia because doing so would have meant being banned from returning to Cuba —and seeing my loved ones— for at least eight years. However, many did abandon the mission; ironically, many were high-ranking "revolutionaries," utter hypocrites.

Everything I have stated here is entirely true. I remember those corrupt individuals vividly.

April 19, 2025



CubaArchive.org
Free Society Project, Inc.

Reproduction and distribution of this material is authorized
for educational purposes as long as its source is cited

⁷ Leanes was representative of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in Bolivia until 2019, after which he served as representative in Chile until 2024.