



Cuba's Human Trafficking Business in Canada: The Cuban "Mission" to Sherritt's Refinery in Alberta

August 25, 2025

This report presents evidence suggesting that Cuban workers at the Canadian refinery of the Canadian-Cuban Moa Joint Venture are subjected to a system of exploitation resembling that imposed by the Cuban government in its medical, educational, and other internationalist missions abroad. While Cuba Archive cannot independently verify the accuracy of the information in whole or in part, the documents and testimony are deemed credible and are presented here as received. Cuba Archive's publications describing the labor exploitation (trafficking in persons) of exported workers by the Cuban state supplement this report.¹

Background

In December 1994, Moa Joint Venture (Moa JV) was established as a 50-50 joint venture between Canadian company Sherritt International Corporation and Cuban state-owned CubaNiquel, which operates under the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Based on the agreement, three companies were formed, each with 50-50 ownership:²

- 1) Moa Nickel S.A., which operates the nickel-cobalt mine and processing plant in Moa, Holguín province, Cuba.
- 2) The Cobalt Refinery Company Inc. (COREFCO), which owns and operates a metals refinery in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, Canada.
- 3) International Cobalt Company Inc. (ICCI), based in The Bahamas, which purchases mixed sulfides from Moa Nickel and other suppliers, contracts COREFCO for refining, and commercializes the finished nickel and cobalt products.

Testimony

Following is the testimony and references to documents provided to Cuba Archive by a Cuban intimately connected to the operation.³ All cited amounts are in Canadian dollars (CAD \$) unless otherwise noted.

¹ See, in particular: "Forced compelled labor (trafficking in persons) by the Cuban state, Information for the 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, US Department of State, Feb. 2025, Updated Apr. 2025, Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-TIP-Info.-Submission-Cuba-Archive-PUBLISHED.pdf>

² Moa Nickel Project, Cuba, Technical Report, Dec. 31, 2018, CSA Global.

³ Anonymous source, in telephone conversations, emails, and texts with Maria Werlau, August 4-12, 2025. (Many details are kept confidential to avoid possible retaliation by the Cuban regime.)

Both partners in the joint venture have been represented in all three locations: Canadians go to work in Cuba, Cubans go to work in Canada, and both Cubans (always four) and Canadians work in The Bahamas. The CEO of the mine in Moa is Canadian, and the CEO of the Canadian refinery is Cuban. Therefore, since the beginning of the joint venture, Cuba has sent around six Cubans, all state employees, to work at the Alberta refinery operated by COREFCO. These typically include the CEO, one refinery technician, and four specialists in accounting, finance, and marketing. They are carefully selected and almost all are loyal members of the Communist Party of Cuba, who have already undergone very thorough vetting to confirm their active ideological-political commitment to the Cuban regime.

Going on a “mission” to Canada is considered a major opportunity. In Cuba, a professional working as an administrative, accounting, or financial specialist in Moa —or a similar state enterprise— earns less than USD \$100 a month at the real market exchange rate for salaries paid in Cuban pesos. Even at the Moa plant, where wages are higher than the national average, the pay is still meager. In Canada, the workers get decent housing, good medical and dental care, and even a car — luxuries few Cubans can attain.

On paper, Cubans working in Canada receive treatment similar to that of Canadian employees. If they wish, they may bring their immediate family (spouse and children). Most do, since “living in Canada is a privilege no matter what, and more so for a Cuban ... plus, they’re allowed an extra \$180/month for a spouse and \$150/month for each child under 18. For around 6–8 years, they weren’t allowed to bring their families, because they were staying, but when they realized that people stayed anyway, they started to allow it again.”

According to documents from 2016, as part of the relocation process believed to remain in place, COREFCO gives each Cuban worker a “confidential”⁴ employment letter specifying the compensation, benefits, and monthly deductions for housing, insurance, and furniture. The 2016 letter obtained by Cuba Archive was signed by Andrea Marion, Human Resources Advisor.⁵ The Cubans also receive a detailed handbook titled “Long Term Assignment, The Cobalt Refinery Company Inc. Policy, for Personnel Transferred from Cuba to Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, Canada,” which outlines the contract’s terms, including salary and benefits.⁶

Employment benefits include annual salary, a 15% expatriate premium, initial taxable allowances for clothing and housing, a loan for furniture, medical, hospital, dental, and travel insurance; life insurance reportedly for twice the Cuban basic salary in Canadian funds;⁷ a taxable

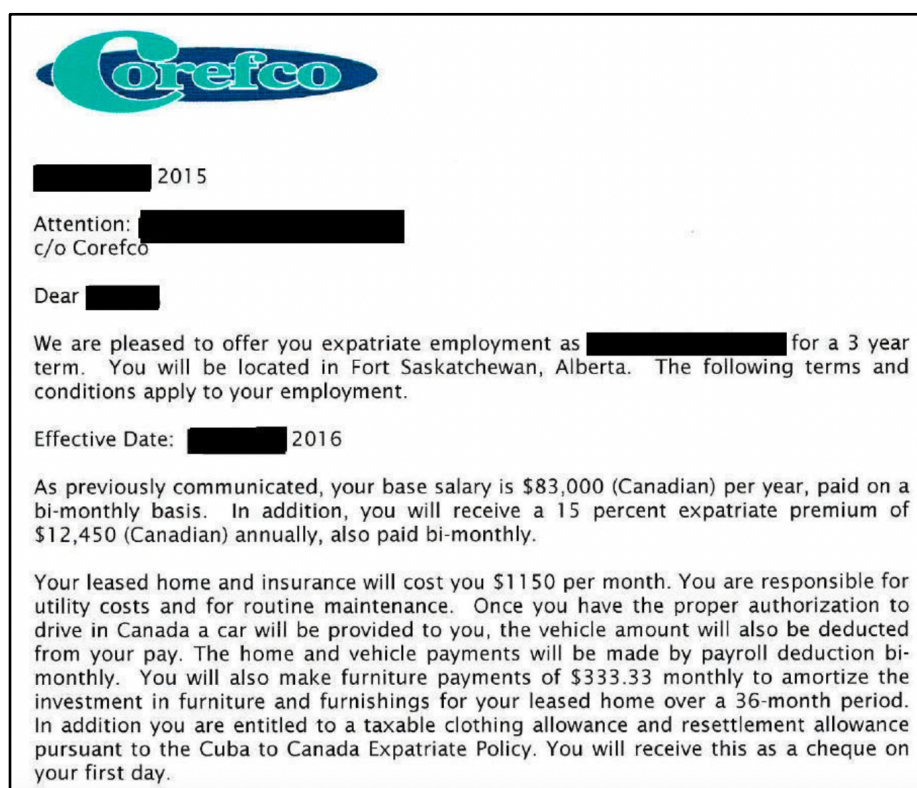
⁴ This is described in section 3.5, “Payment Terms,” of the manual provided to the Cuban employees. (<https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/COREFCO-LONG-TERM-ASSIGNMENT.pdf>)

⁵ Contract letter, 2015 for employment starting 2016, https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/CONTRACT_Redacted.pdf.

⁶ “Long Term Assignment,” op. cit.

⁷ The life insurance was \$13,500 in 2016, which did not correspond to the worker’s actual salary.

clothing allowance of \$3,000 (more for senior directors); and a taxable housing allowance equal to one month's salary. Employees may use a car leased by the company, but they must cover the operating costs and insurance. In addition, the employee and his or her spouse are offered a driving course, if required by insurance, and they may obtain a driver's license. COREFCO also remits an "income tariff" directly to the Cuban government for the employee's pension, education, and disability, which in 2016 was US \$2,750/year for a specialist.⁸ (It is unknown how that amount is calculated, but, reportedly, the Cuban workers do not receive the supposed benefits.)



Extract of an employment letter of a Cuban hired for a 3-year assignment at the refinery at Fort Saskatchewan, Canada, beginning in 2016.

On paper, everything seems normal. COREFCO pays each employee with direct deposits twice a month into Canadian bank accounts in their names. The handbook details the following under "Payment Method" (3.4). "Employees who are working in Canada, are paid by The Cobalt Refinery Company Inc. and all salaries less regular deductions are paid to the employee using the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Canadian taxes are deducted at source and income taxes are filed annually."

According to documents provided to Cuba Archive, in 2016 the gross annual salary paid by COREFCO to one of the Cuban specialists was \$95,450 (\$83,000 salary plus 15% expat premium).

⁸ In 2016, the handbook provided to Cuban employees stated in "Income Rate (3.3)": "Cobalt Refinery Company Inc. will deliver annually, \$2,750.00 US to the proper Cuban authorities on behalf, if it is determined by Cuba and the Cobalt Refinery Company Inc. authorities that such a payment is required."

After a 35% deduction for taxes payable to the Canadian government, the net salary was \$62,042. Monthly deductions were applied for furniture, housing, car insurance, and other items totaling \$1,410 (\$16,920 annually), resulting in a net payment by COREFCO of \$45,122 (47% of the gross salary). See below a cropped biweekly pay slip for a Cuban worker at the refinery for the period March 16 to 31, 2016 (viewable in full online).⁹

+ Employee [REDACTED]		Pay Cheque Detail			
Pay Type Corefco Semi-Monthly (S3)		Pay Period 1606			
From 2016-03-16		To 2016-03-31			
Gross Pay	4,732.35	Direct Deposit	2,503.07		
Deductions	2,229.28	Taxable Benefits			
Net Pay	2,503.07	Date Paid	2016-03-31		
Payments					
Description	Hours	Amount	YTD Hours	YTD Amount	
REGULAR	106.00	4,213.60	106.00	4,213.60	
EXPAT		518.75		518.75	
RELOCATE				6,458.33	
Deductions					
Description	Amount	Taxable Benefits	YTD Amount	YTD Tax Benefits	
REC-CLUB	1.00		1.00		
ER-CLUB					
MORTGAGE	538.50		538.50		
ADVANCE			4,197.92		
FURNIT	166.50		166.50		
CPP	234.25		234.25		
EI	88.97		88.97		
TAX	1,200.06		3,460.47		
WCB					
Direct Deposit Details					
Branch Number	1069		2,503.07	Amount	

Bi-monthly payroll details for one of the Cubans working at the refinery in Canada, March 16-31, 2016.

As in Cuban missions in other countries, workers are required to transfer the majority of their salary to the Cuban government each month. To calculate the income subject to the mandatory transfer from the net amount paid by COREFCO the workers could deduct a series of allowable expenses, submitting all corresponding receipts to CubaNiquel with the copy of the transfer: gasoline, internet, electricity, water, and up to \$50 in over-the-counter medications. The final balance was then calculated by applying an exchange rate with the US dollar indicated by CubaNiquel.¹⁰ A worker who

⁹ COREFCO (Moa JV) Pay Cheque, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/PAY-CHEQUE-Redacted.pdf>

¹⁰ In 2016, the exchange rate used by CubaNiquel to calculate the transfer was imposed every three months. Some missions in other countries have reported that it is usually favorable to the Cuban government and is yet another way to deprive workers of their wages abroad.

had not brought family and earned the salary detailed above (\$45,122 of the gross salary of \$95,450), was left with just US\$460 per month, or approximately CAD \$600 (CAD \$7,200 per year) —only 15.9% of what COREFCO paid them. This is a wage confiscation rate of 84.1% (of \$37,922 annually). A worker who had brought his/her spouse and two children to Canada could keep an additional \$480, for a total of \$1,080 per month¹¹ (\$12,960 per year), at a wage confiscation rate of 71.3%.

A single worker with just \$600 in disposable monthly income would have barely enough to cover groceries,¹² yet had to cover food and *all* other personal needs, including assistance sent to family members in Cuba. \$1,080 was also insufficient to provide a family of four a decent living; although prices were lower in 2016, today, around \$1,403 a month is required just for groceries.¹³ Still, the Cuban workers for COREFCO in Canada were better off than in Cuba, where an administrative, accounting, or financial specialist in Moa earned around 1,500 Cuban pesos a month, or US\$60.

All Cuban employees had to send the monthly transfers to **Account No. 030000000265124 of “CubaNiquel Transito” at Banco Financiero Internacional**, which is reportedly part of the Cuban military conglomerate GAESA.¹⁴ (It is unknown if that account is still in existence.) Cuba Archive has copies of transfers by four workers in 2016.¹⁵ Among them is one for \$18,919.60 of April 13, 2016 by Delvia Acosta Arostica, Cuba's CEO at the refinery. Applying to her salary the 84.1% confiscation rate of the specialist's salary (detailed above), she would have been earning a net monthly salary of \$22,496 (47% of a gross salary of \$47,865, or \$574,380 annually). A staunch supporter of the Cuban regime, she reportedly went to work at the Department of Defense for Cuba's Ministry of Mines and Energy after returning from her mission in Canada.

It's not possible to accurately determine the precise monthly amount of the mandatory transfers in 2016 by the six Cuban workers at the refinery in Canada, as each employee might have had a different salary. However, it can be roughly estimated. Assuming that five of the six employees had the same salary as one the specialist earning \$83,000 per year plus 15% expat premium, they would have transferred \$189,610 to Cuba annually, which, together with the CEO's transfers of around \$227,028 (\$18,919 per month), amounted to almost half a million Canadian dollars, \$459,490, each

¹¹ CAD\$180 for a spouse; CAD\$150 for each child under 18.

¹² To feed an adult for a month in Canada is generally estimated to require CAD \$300 to \$600 per month. Actual figures depend on age, sex, and household size. (“How much does one person spend on groceries in Canada? Tips to save and budget better,” *Loan Express*, May 20, 2025; “Here's the big question: how much do groceries really cost in Canada?”)

¹³ This equals \$16,834 a year. (Lucas Casaletto, “Here's how much the average Canadian family of 4 will have to spend on groceries in 2025,” *City News*, Jan 2, 2025.) Edmonton's Social Planning Council states that a healthy diet for a family of four will cost at least CAD \$15,400 per year in 2023, or CAD \$1,283 per month. (S. Sheloff, Edmonton's living wage report 2023, Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2023.)

¹⁴ According to analyst Emilio Morales, since 2016, the International Finance Bank (IFB) has deployed a silent strategy to seize the country's wealth. (Emilio Morales, Cuba, GAESA y el colapso del régimen, *Infobae*, 17 de enero de 2023.)

¹⁵ See <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/OTHER-TRANSFERS-Redacted.pdf> and <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/TRANSFER-Redacted.pdf>

year. In addition, Cuba received an “income tariff” per worker of US \$2,750 per year for each specialist earning \$83,000 a year.

CIBC Customer's Copy Copie du client

2404613
3958 BL 2015/01

Reference Reference:
FORT SASKATCHEWAN BANKING CENTRE
FORT SASKATCHEWAN/TA BY CABLE
Date
18,869.60 CANADIAN DOLLAR VALUE DATE: Apr/13/2016

Payment Order Ordre de paiement

CURRENCY.....: CANADIAN DOLLAR	
FOREIGN AMOUNT.....: 18,869.60	
EXCHANGE RATE.....: 1.0	
CANADIAN EQUIVALENT: 18,869.60	
SERVICE CHARGE RATE: 1.0	
SERVICE CHARGES.....: 50.00	CAD 50.00
FAX ADMIN FEE.....:	CAD
FAX CONFIRM FEE.....:	CAD
CORRESP CHARGES.....:	CAD
CANADIAN AMOUNT.....: 18,919.60	
TOTAL FOREIGN AMOUNT: 18,919.60	
CUSTOMER'S ACCOUNT.: 01069/80-74534	CAD

COMMENTS:

BY ORDER OF:
DELVIA ACOSTA AROSTICA
9221 87 ST
FORT SASKATCHEWAN AB CA T8L 1G8

DETAILS OF PAYMENT (EG. INVOICE # ETC):

DESTINATION BANK:
BANK IDENTIFIER:
BANCO FINANCIERO INTERNACIONAL
MOA HOLGUIN
MOA HOLGUIN
CUBA
ROUTING CODE:
ROUTING NUMBER:

PAYMENT INSTRUCTIONS:
CREDIT ACCOUNT AND NOTIFY

BENEFICIARY:
ACCOUNT NUMBER:
0300000002625124
CUBANIQUEL TRANSITO
MOA HOLGUIN
MOA HOLGUIN CA CU

CORRESP. CHARGES:
TO BE PAID BY BENEFICIARY

INTERMEDIARY BANK:
BANK IDENTIFIER:

01069-010 **CIBC** 2
APR 13 2016
9903 - 101 STREET
FORT SASKATCHEWAN AB
01069-010

Transfer for \$18,919.60 by Delvia Acosta Arostica to a CubaNiquel account at Banco Financiero Internacional, April 13, 2016.

Cuban workers sent on medical and educational missions are subject to the “Disciplinary Regulations for Cooperators Providing Services Abroad.”¹⁶ In Canada, all Cubans are verbally “read the riot act” upon arrival —warned that they must follow the established rules for internationalists. As in other Cuban missions, they are not allowed to socialize or have romantic relationships with locals, nor are they allowed to leave Fort Saskatchewan without permission from the Cuban CEO. They may never go out alone and must do so in pairs or in groups of three from the mission. Even to

¹⁶ “Reglamento disciplinario para los cooperantes que prestan servicios en el exterior,” passed by Resolution 368 of 2020 of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX) of Cuba, Cuba Archive. (Some workers are read the document, some are made to sign it, some are provided a copy; it apparently depends on the country and type of mission.)

go shopping in Edmonton, the provincial capital 30 minutes away, they must request permission.¹⁷ They all know that they are being watched by their colleagues, some or all of whom are State Security officers or collaborators. As is customary in Cuba and international missions, those who are members of the Cuban Communist Party—almost all of them—hold monthly meetings to receive instructions and political training; in Canada, “they meet secretly, so the Canadians don’t find out.”

Transit 01069	Branch / Centre bancaire FORT SASKATCHEWAN BANKING CENTRE FORT SASKATCHEWANALTA	Account No. / N° de compte [REDACTED]	2207400 172 BIL-200702
RE CABLE: #4279628 FOR CAD 3,672.68		3,672.68	
AT EXCHANGE RATE 1.0			
+ TOTAL CHARGES (SEE QUOTE FOR DETAILS)		30.00	
BENEFICIARY CUBANQUEL TRANSITO, MOA HOLGUIN,			
		DATE 2016-05-10 Y/A MM DJ	
		Total \$ *****3,702.68	
Debit Advice / Avis de débit			
[REDACTED]			
• FORT SASKATCHEWAN AB • TBL 4L9		01088-010 MAY 10 2016 203-101 STREET FORT SASKATCHEWAN, AB S4N 1G1 CIBC	
		Pro-Manager / Pour le directeur Le logo CIBC est une marque déposée de la Banque CIBC.	

Debit receipt for a monthly transfer by a Cuban worker at the Canadian refinery, May 10, 2016.

Reportedly, the above scheme has operated for the last 30 years. Canadian employees of the refinery pretend to not know—but have apparently long known—that the Cuban workers must send most of their pay to the Cuban government and that their movements are controlled. Some have remarked that Canadian diplomats inquired whether mandatory transfers were required, but the Cuban workers have denied it, to keep their mission assignment. They live better in Canada and some already go with plans to stay. Plus, they can travel to the mission with regular blue passports (not the official red ones, which are restricted in use), which they may also keep, except sometimes when they travel back to Cuba on vacation. Once in Canada, if they leave their jobs at the refinery, they can’t work with the work permit for the job at COREFCO, but when they apply for asylum, it is easily granted and another work permit is issued.

Many who have stayed did not wait to complete the mission and abandoned it well before their three-year assignment was up. The latest “deserters” are from 2021 and 2023. Around 40 Cubans who have abandoned the mission or remained in Canada after completing it reside with their families in Fort Saskatchewan or the nearby city of Edmonton. They have all been willing to pay the usual punishment of not being able to return to their homeland and to see their loved ones for at least eight years.¹⁸ Some have never returned, even after eight years, for fear of retaliation. Article 176 of the

¹⁷ Fort Saskatchewan is a very small town, with only 28,000 people, centered around the Sherritt plant and other chemical plants. (2024 Municipal Census Results, City of Saskatchewan, <https://www.fortsask.ca/en/your-city-hall/resources/Documents/Census/2024-Municipal-Census-Report.pdf>)

¹⁸ Article 24.1 of Cuba’s Immigration Law establishes that persons who have been “declared undesirable or expelled” or who have “failed to comply with the regulations of the Immigration Law, its Regulations, and the complementary provisions for entry into the country” are considered inadmissible for entry into the country.

Cuban Penal Code punishes with three to eight years in prison the attempt to abandon or actually abandon a job abroad, the refusal to return to Cuba when ordered to do so, or travel to another country without authorization.

The Canadian government has reportedly granted all of them asylum. At least some have provided evidence of the forced transfer of their wages and described the arbitrary measures to which they were subjected on Canadian soil. Therefore, it has been aware of the labor exploitation scheme—human trafficking—on their territory; although somewhat more sophisticated than in other Cuban internationalist missions, it violates Canadian and international laws.

Conclusions

The testimony and documents presented herein are compelling and easily verifiable. They suggest that the Cuban dictatorship has engaged in the trafficking of Cuban workers in Canada for around three decades and that the Canadian government has known about it. Canada ratified the 2000 Palermo Protocol against Trafficking in 2002.¹⁹ Its government is, thus, obligated to urgently address the reported exploitation.

If the situation described above is accurate, the Cubans who work or have worked at the Canada refinery have been willing participants, some even enforcers, of the exploitation scheme. Yet, all exported workers are considered victims—modern slaves—of Cuba's totalitarian regime. The Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons as (*italics ours*) (a) “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of *coercion*, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the *abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation*. ... (b) *The consent of a victim* of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article *shall be irrelevant* where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used.”²⁰

Recommendations

The government of Canada should:

- 1) Audit the asylum applications of Cuban ex-COREFCO employees and their bank transfers to Banco Financiero Internacional.

Apparently based on this provision, entry of individuals who internationalist missions or fail to return upon completion is de facto prohibited for eight years.

¹⁹ Canada signed the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) on December 14, 2000, and ratified it on May 13, 2002. The Protocol entered into force for Canada on August 13, 2002.

²⁰ Art. 3, b). of the Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons.

- 2) Have the Justice Department²¹ with human rights officers and international trafficking experts interview former Cuban refinery workers who live in Canada, offering them confidentiality and protection.²²
- 3) Allow current Cuban employees of the refinery to remain in their jobs only if they can be guaranteed their full salaries and freedom from coercion, arbitrary controls, and punishments.
- 4) Investigate —and sanction, if appropriate— Sherritt International, Cuba's Canadian partner, for complicity in the exploitation at the Fort Saskatchewan refinery.
- 5) Investigate —and sanction, if appropriate— Canadian banks for enabling the Cuban export workers' mandatory transfers (wage confiscation) into accounts controlled by the Cuban regime, as these are the spoils of its global trafficking enterprise.²³

The governments of The Bahamas and Canada should investigate the International Cobalt Company Inc. of The Bahamas, a Sherritt-Cuba trading company, for complicity in the trafficking of Cuban workers in Bahamian territory, who are reportedly always four.²⁴

If Canada does not promptly investigate and remedy any proven trafficking described in this report, the U.S. Department of State should, in its annual TIP (Trafficking in Persons) report, classify Canada as a country that knowingly tolerates trafficking in its territory, and implicated Canadian officials should be subject to sanctions in accordance with the Trafficking in Persons Victims Act of 2000, as amended.

Report prepared by Maria C. Werlan



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²¹ See, for instance, *A Handbook for Criminal Justice Practitioners on Trafficking in Persons*, Department of Justice, Canada, Jan. 2024.

²² See *Suggested guidelines for screening Cuban workers in third countries for forced labor / trafficking in persons*, Cuba Archive, Jun. 2025.

²³ Ibid. See on p. 14 a copy of a monthly transfer (dated May 31, 2018) from Scotiabank Bahamas Ltd. Palmdale in Nassau, Bahamas, by a Cuban teacher to Acct. No. 03000000429620 of CSMC (Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos) at Banco Financiero Internacional of Cuba, for an alleged “family remittance.”

²⁴ See Cuba Archive's recent report *Cuba's Medical and Educational Brigades in The Bahamas: a disconcerting “cooperation,”* Cuba Archive, Apr. 28, 2025.