



Summary of the report “Cuba’s internationalist mission in Jamaica: a troubling collaboration” published by Cuba Archive on July 30, 2026

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Executive Summary

This briefing examines the bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Jamaica, focusing on the bilateral cooperation associated with the deployment of Cuban medical and educational brigades. While officially promoted as "internationalist solidarity" and humanitarian aid, the evidence characterizes these missions as a systematic program of state-sponsored forced labor and human trafficking.

Key findings reveal that the Cuban State, with the acquiescence of the Jamaican government, subjects the Cuban "collaborators" to conditions of modern slavery. Specialized medical personnel work up to 268 hours a month for an effective wage as low as US\$3.72 per hour, while the Cuban government confiscates approximately 50% of their earnings. The program is governed by restrictive disciplinary regulations that include the confiscation of passports, prohibitions on local social integration, constant political surveillance, and extreme punishments for breaking the rules.

Despite public denials from Jamaican authorities and bilateral secrecy and lacking transparency, contracts obtained extra-officially contain clauses that explicitly prevent Jamaican entities from hiring Cuban specialists who leave the mission, effectively trapping workers in the state-run scheme. Furthermore, the missions serve as vehicles for ideological penetration in Jamaican schools and as a primary revenue source for the Cuban regime, which prioritizes labor exports over its own domestic healthcare and education crises.

The Jamaican government and media systematically extol Cuba’s generosity while ignoring that these services are a commercial priority for the Cuban State, intended to generate hard currency rather than altruistic "solidarity."

Historical and Political Context

The cooperation between Cuba and Jamaica is rooted in the socialist ties established in 1972 by Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley and Fidel Castro.

- **1970s Origins:** Manley viewed Cuba as a model for Caribbean development. The first Cuban health personnel arrived in 1976.
- **1981 Suspension:** Following the 1980 election of Edward Seaga, diplomatic ties were severed, and Cuban personnel were repatriated due to allegations of interference in internal affairs.
- **1990 Restoration:** Diplomatic relations and collaboration resumed when Manley returned to power.

- **Expansion (2004–Present):** The launch of "Operation Miracle" (eye care) paved the way for a nationwide footprint of Cuban brigades. Currently, Jamaica hosts the fourth largest Cuban medical brigade in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Cuban Medical Brigade: Mechanics of Exploitation

The medical mission in Jamaica consists of over 400 professionals, including doctors, nurses, and biomedical engineers. Analysis of contracts and testimonies reveals a rigid system of financial and personal control.

1. Financial Confiscation

While the Jamaican government pays salaries for these specialists, the Cuban State implements a "confiscatory" model:

- **Mandatory Remittances:** Collaborators must remit 50% of their monthly balance to a Cuban Medical Brigade account at the National Commercial Bank of Jamaica.
- **Overtime Seizure:** 50% of payments for "sessions" (on-call duties) and additional hours are also seized by the Cuban government.
- **Wage Disparity:** A specialized doctor working 268 hours a month (including on-call shifts) earns an effective wage of approximately US\$3.72 per hour after remittances.
- **Exchange Rate Manipulation:** The mission utilizes an arbitrary exchange rate (e.g., 154 CUP per USD) that effectively devalues the portion of the salary the worker is allowed to keep.

2. Disciplinary and Movement Restrictions

All workers must sign "Disciplinary Regulations for Cooperators Who Provide Services Abroad," which mandate:

- **Passport confiscation:** Official passports (red) must be surrendered to mission chiefs upon arrival.
- **Surveillance:** Personnel are prohibited from associating with anyone not supporting "revolutionary ideals" or from marrying locals without authorization.
- **Curfews:** Movement is often restricted after 6:00 PM.
- **Forced return:** Workers must return to Cuba immediately upon the termination of their contract; failure to do so results in being labeled a "deserter," punishable by 2 to 8 years in prison under the Cuban Penal Code.

Cuba's Educational Brigade and Ideological Penetration

The educational mission involves approximately 75–86 teachers across 78 Jamaican schools. The bilateral agreement (signed May 2021) contains several troubling clauses that facilitate trafficking.

Compulsory "No-Hire" Clauses

Clause 2.2.18 of the educational agreement obligates the Jamaican Ministry of Education (MOEYT) to:

1. **Refuse employment:** Not hire any Cuban specialist in the public system if they cease providing services under the agreement.
2. **Cancel permits:** Actively seek the cancellation of work permits for any specialist who leaves the mission.

Classroom Indoctrination

The brigade acts as a vehicle for "political-ideological education."

- **Content:** Curriculum materials and "cultural acts" exalt Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as "liberators of the Caribbean."
- **Methods:** Jamaican children participate in events that promote "anti-imperialist thinking" and Marxist-Leninist principles under the guise of Spanish language instruction.
- **Literacy Programs:** The "Yo sí puedo" (Yes, I can) program is utilized as both a teaching tool and an ideological vehicle.

Statistical discrepancies

A lack of transparency surrounds the financial and operational details of the brigades, as well as its results. There is no known local verification or auditing of performance statistics provided by the Cuban mission to the government of Jamaica, which is suspected as manipulated

Reported data for 2019-2024:

Patient Consultations 1.4 million+

Surgeries 30,000+ (includes "Operation Miracle" eye surgeries).

International Relations and Anti-Trafficking Efforts

U.S. Position and Sanctions

The United States has categorized Cuba as a Tier 3 country in its Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report due to state-sponsored forced labor.

- **Visa Restrictions:** In 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced visa restrictions for foreign government officials complicit in the Cuban labor export program.
- **Funding Contradiction:** Between 2022 and 2024, the U.S. provided Jamaica with over \$113 million in aid. Since money is fungible, this aid effectively subsidizes the Jamaican government's payments to the Cuban brigades.

Jamaican Government Defense

Prime Minister Andrew Holness and Health Minister Christopher Tufton have denied exploitation, asserting that Cubans are treated within Jamaican labor laws. However, the 2024 U.S. TIP Report notes that Jamaican authorities:

- Fail to acknowledge Cuban workers as a high-risk group for forced labor.
- Do not screen Cuban "collaborators" for trafficking indicators.
- Continue to permit the retention of passports by Cuban mission supervisors.

Conclusions

The bilateral cooperation between Cuba and Jamaica constitutes a system of **institutionalized forced labor**. The scheme is characterized by:

1. **Financial exploitation:** Confiscation of the majority of worker wages to sustain the Cuban dictatorship.

2. **Legal complicity:** Jamaican agreements that prevent workers from seeking independent employment, thereby enforcing the Cuban State's control over its citizens on foreign soil.
3. **Ideological influence:** The use of educational platforms to proselytize to Jamaican youth.
4. **Neglect of Cuban citizens.**
 - The export of professionals despite severe domestic shortages in Cuba, proving the program is a commercial venture rather than humanitarian aid. Cuba faces a domestic shortage of 17,000+ teachers and thousands of doctors.
 - Cuba reported \$4.4 billion in export services from the medical brigades in 2023 of which it invested only 0.8% reinvested in Cuban healthcare.

Recommendations

1. **Transparency:** The Government of Jamaica must publicly disclose all bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding, and financial records related to the Cuban brigades.
2. **Independent Verification:** Working and living conditions of Cuban personnel should be audited by international observers and jurists from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.
3. **Direct Hiring:** Jamaica should transition to hiring Cuban professionals directly and competitively, ensuring they retain 100% of their wages and full control over their travel documents.
4. **U.S. Accountability:** The U.S. government should implement visa restrictions on complicit Jamaican officials and condition future aid on the cessation of trafficking-related practices within the brigades.