Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Angola
February 2025

Excerpts from
"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, U.S. Department of State," Free Society Project/Cuba Archive, February 2025

Edited excerpts from "Update on selected countries' medical brigades": Angola

The 2024 U.S. Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP report) classified Angola as a Tier 2 country that "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so."[1] Regarding the partnership with Cuba in the forced labor brigades, it reads: "According to the Cuban government, in 2023, there were 2,056 government-affiliated Cuban workers in Angola, including 1,171 Cuban medical professionals, 582 workers in education, 212 workers in companies, and 91 workers in other sectors. The Cuban government may have forced government-affiliated civilian personnel to work in Angola."[2]

In fact, Angola is likely the second most lucrative market for Cuba's labor export services after Venezuela, which is the largest one, but has a lower profitability per worker. Cuba's enterprises in Angola operate under the umbrella of Antex (Corporación Antillana Exportadora S. A.), which is purportedly owned by Cuba's military conglomerate GAESA, and its network of at least 9 companies registered in Angola operates with the names Antex and Imbondex.[3] Antex's Director for Business Development wrote in his LinkedIn page: "In my intermediation activity, I have had the opportunity to negotiation projects and commercial operations in various sectors of the economy and manage portfolios of contracts of more than 200 million MMUSD per year. ...I have visited 14 countries on commercial and business missions."[4]

That CSMC is not the provider of Cuba's health export services in Angola likely stems from Cuba's 16-year military intervention (1975-1991), when several high-ranking Cuban military officers developed multimillion dollar businesses in Angola.[5]

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[1] 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Angola, U.S. Department of State, https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/angola/

[2] Ibid.

[3] Imbondex takes its name from the national tree of Angola, the imbondeiro, a giant species also called baobab. (A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (i)," op. cit.)

[4] Adonis Norberto De los Santos Siveright, LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/in/adonis-norberto-de-los-santos-siveright-9730b291/ (the reference to $200M was removed and the text edited after the el Toque investigation was published; Annarela Grimal, screen shot of Adonis Norberto De los Santos LinkedIn page, Mar. 18, 2024, sent to the author, Feb. 3, 2025.

[5] Cuba acted as a proxy of the former Soviet Union (USSR) and sent 377,033 military personnel and over 50,000 civilian aid workers during the conflict, many of whom died or were injured. It was a very profitable operation for Cuba, as the USSR provided all the war material and Cuba was paid by Angola per soldier, officer

An extraordinary in-depth investigation by journalist Annarella Grimal published by El Toque and Connectas[6] revealed information from an extensive batch of leaked documents. It confirmed that Cuba is present in 30 economic sectors in Angola, including health, education, energy, oil, hydraulic resources, highway and bridge construction, transportation, mining, real estate, fishing, and electronics, activities for which Cuba provides export workers. The Government of Angola even hires Cubans for sensitive posts in strategic government agencies and ministries including the Armed Forces, Ministry of the Interior, intelligence service, the president's security detail, the national police, immigration services, penitentiary and civil protection, fire control services, and criminal investigations.[7] According to the El Toque/Connectas investigation, from 2004 to 2020, Cuba derived at least $6.7 billion in revenue from these businesses in Angola.

Number of Cuba's export workers in Angola

Year	No.
2012	1,066
2013	4,000
2014	4,602
2015	3,000
2016	3,023
2017	2,243
2018	2,000
2019	2,091
2020	2,050
2021	2,000
2022	2,000
2023	2,056
Total	*30,131*

Source: Official documents provided to Annarela Grimal, 2023.

Cuba also derives revenues from three other business lines:

a) The education of Angolans in Cuba, especially in Medicine, paid by the Angolan State. 280 Angolans were studying in Cuba in 2022 at an annual cost of $18,000 each ($5 million in total). 16,500 had reportedly graduated as of October 2024.[8]

b) The sale of tourism and health tourism services for Angolans to travel to Cuba.

c) Travel, transportation, and cargo services provided by Cuba for its collaborators in Angola (paid by the Government of Angola or by the Cuban workers themselves).

The number of Cuban collaborators in Angola has been quite steady at the 2,000 range in the seven years to 2023, but it was up to double that amount for four years in 2013-2016. (See Table on the left.) The customary discrepancies arise in Cuba's official media reports of the numbers. In August 2024, when Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel visited Angola, it was reported that 2,056 Cubans were working in there, of whom 1,171 were doctors and 582 were professors.[9] Three weeks earlier, during Cuba's Prime Minister's visit to Angola, the number was reported at 2,700.[10] (There was no explanation for the discrepancy.) Again in August 2024, 1,732 collaborators were reported in health, education, and hydraulic resources,[11] but workers in other sectors were not mentioned. An October 2024 report refers to over 1,243 Cuban health

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and aid worker, the State retaining most the payment. It also developed other profitable businesses in Angola (wood, ivory, etc.) that altogether generated revenues estimated at several hundred million a year. ("Cuba in Angola: an old and lucrative business of the Castros," Cuba Archive, Aug.-Sep. 2017, https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Cuba-in-Angola.pdf)

[6] A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (i)," op. cit. (Cuba Archive cooperated with this investigation, which also used at least two of its reports.)

[7] Internal records obtained for the investigation reflect 276 Cubans hired by the Angolan government in different sensitive positions. (A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (i), op. cit.)

[8] "Presidente angolano inaugura hospital Comandante Raúl Díaz Argüelles," *Cuba Debate*, Oct. 21, 2024.

[9] "Díaz-Canel dialogó con cooperantes de Cuba en Angola," Luanda, Prensa Latina, Aug. 20, 2024.

[10] "Marrero conversa con colaboradores cubanos en Angola," Radio Angulo, Aug. 3, 2024. https://www.radioangulo.cu/2024/08/03/marrero-conversa-con-colaboradores-cubanos-en-angola/

[11] "Primer ministro de Cuba conversó con colaboradores en Angola," *Trabajadores*, Aug. 4, 2024.

professionals.[12] In late 2023 and again in 2024, 2,056 workers were reported, including 1,171 in the health sector, 582 in education "helping to train 3,000 Angolans as doctors," 212 "in companies" and 91 in other sectors.[13]

The leaked documents confirm that Cuban health workers are posted in 26 locations all over Angola:[14]
1. Centro Oftalmológico Internacional de Benguela (COIB)
2. Hospital Público De Bocoio, Benguela
3. Hospital General Provincial, Benguela
4. Hospital Público De Vouga, Bie
5. Hospital General Provincial, Cabinda
6. Hospital General Provincial de Ndalatando, Cuanza Norte
7. Hospital Público de Camabatela, Cuanza Norte
8. Brigada Médica Cubana, Cunene
9. Hospital General Provincial Lubango, Huila
10. Facultad de Medicina, Huila
11. Hospital Publico Dona Maria Pia, Luanda
12. Meditex Serviços Médicos e Farmacêuticos, Luanda
13. Hospital do Prenda, Luanda
14. Clínica Multiperfil, Luanda
15. Clínica Girasol, Luanda
16. Clínica Caridad Nova Vida, Luanda
17. Clínica Rosymed, Luanda
18. Facultad de Medicina, Malanje
19. Hospital Central Provincial, Malanje
20. Centro de Medicina Física y Rehabilitación, Malanje
21. Centro de Investigacion e Informacion de Medicamentos y Toxicologia (CIMETOX), Malanje
22. Hospital Materno Infantil, Malanje
23. Hospital Provincial Ngola Kimbanda, Namibia
24. Hospital Provincial de Zaire, Zaire
25. Facultad de Medicina, Benguela (only education)
26. Instituto Superior de Ciencias de la Salud, Cuando Cubango (only education)

Some of the Cuban health workers are assigned to private clinics owned by Cuba included in the above list. Meditex clinic in Luanda (capital of Angola), promoted as "100% Cuban medical care," was apparently one of the first companies created when Antex took control of Cuba's businesses in Angola in 1989. Under the corporate name Meditex Servicios Médicos y Farmacéuticos, S. A., the clinic offers more than 30 specialties. According to a Cuban doctor who worked there from 2013 to 2015, Meditex's prices were "excessively high" even though its infrastructure and equipment were lacking. Meditex also owns pharmacies that sell medical and pharmaceutical products as well as perfumes produced in Cuba;[15] it has branches such as the dental clinic Meditex-Alvalade Stomatological Clinic and two Ophthalmological Centers attended by Cuban specialists (listed above).[16] The Cuban staff

[12] Ibid.

[13] Seth Galinsky, "Cuba trip to Angola, South Africa marks overthrow of apartheid," *The Militant*, Vol. 87/No. 34, Sep. 11, 2023.

[14] Official documents leaked to Annarela Grimal, shared with the author, Feb. 3, 2025.

[15] See https://www.facebook.com/MeditexLuanda/.

[16] A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (i)," op. cit.

chosen to work at Meditex includes high-level doctor specialists many of whom are part of Cuba's Armed Forces and Ministry of the Interior, and almost all are members of the Cuban Communist Party (membership is by invitation only after careful screening and is highly selective); they are strictly controlled by Cuba's State Security, "more than the rest of the collaborators."[17]

Angola reportedly pays Cuba per health worker a monthly base salary equivalent to $5,000 (it might be more for certain specialists).[18] In 2022, the National Union of Angolan Doctors reported that Angolan doctors earned eight times less than the Cuban doctors.[19] (A 2021 report from a human rights organization cited testimony that Cuba was paid $6 to $7 thousand monthly per collaborator assigned to education and cultural activities.[20]) If the reported number of collaborators is 2,056, Antex is receiving from Angola an estimated $137.2 million annually in gross wages.[21] But, it has not been a smooth ride; a 2017 report by Cuba Archive describes historic problems with payments by Angola and a resulting back-and-forth with the Cuban brigades.[22]

How much does Antex keep in net revenues? The vast majority. In late 2023, Cuban health workers in Angola were paid $500 to $1,200 a month, or an average of roughly $750 for eleven months, as their one-month vacation in Cuba is paid in worthless Cuban pesos and is currently equivalent to around $20 a month for specialists at the top of the pay scale;[23] this represents 9.8% to 13.8% of the $5 to $7 thousand reportedly paid to Cuba per worker. (A table of the actual wages paid to 1,065 workers derived from the leaked documents[24] shows that only 34.8% were paid $750 or more, and 10.3% were paid $500-$550 a month, 50.2% were paid $600-$660 a month, 23% were paid $950 a month, and only .09% were paid $1,200 a month; the weighted average was $744.41.)

Nonetheless, that reduced pay is then subject to many deductions: a stipend paid in local currency equivalent to around $200, a 3% to 10% "contribution" for the Cuban Communist Party, occasional pressured "donations" for natural disasters or large accidents occurring in Cuba (eg. $5 to 20 per occurrence), travel expenses and meals for travel to and from Havana by the workers who reside in other provinces, certain expenses in Angola (sheets, meals, uniforms, food, safety, and hygiene products). As a result, only around 64% of the average $750 monthly gross salary, $477, is left to send for a required deposit into a bank account in Cuba denominated in Cuban convertible pesos (to the US dollar), which is subject to arbitrary and disadvantaged exchange rates far removed from the US dollar to Cuban peso market rate. A case reviewed in the El Toque/Connectas investigation shows

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[17] Ibid.

[18] "Cada médico cubano a trabalhar em Angola aufere anualmente mais 23 milhões kz do que um profissional nacional," *Isto É Noticia*, Apr. 20, 2022.

[19] The National Union of Angolan Doctors (SINMEA) reported that Cuban doctors in Angola were earning a monthly base salary of US$5,000 (approx. 2.1 million kwanzas), while Angolan doctors were earning eight times less, 270,000 kwanzas. ("Cada médico cubano a trabalhar em Angola aufere anualmente mais 23 milhões kz do que um profissional nacional," *Isto É Noticia*, Apr. 20, 2022.)

[20] Sergio Angel, Omara Isabel Ruiz Urquiola, et. al., *Misión educativa cubana en Angola: Instrumento de explotación académica*, Observatorio de Libertad Académica, Informe No. 13, Aug. 2021.

[21] With 2,056 collaborators reported by Cuba in 2023 and 2024 the calculation is as follows: $70,320,0000 (1,172 medical workers paid at $5k a mo. or $60k a year); $43,680,900 (586 workers in education and other sectors paid at $6.5k a mo. or $78k a year); and $23,244,000 (remaining 298 workers paid at $6.5k a mo., $78k a year).

[22] "Cuba in Angola: an old and lucrative business of the Castros," Cuba Archive, Aug-Sep. 2017.

[23] A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (I)," op. cit. (The highest paying doctors earn around CUP 5810 a month plus a small bonus, which at the current market rate is equivalent to around US$20.)

[24] Official documents leaked to Annarela Grimal, op. cit.

that the collaborator lost 44% annually ($3,205 of $5,724) just in the exchange rates applied by Antex to the monthly deposits. The workers, thus, end up with only 4% of the wages paid by Angola, representing just $200 a month for the average doctor. Since this report was published, the net amount of compensation has been further reduced given further devaluation of the Cuban peso.

Bringing goods back home is one of the important benefits of serving abroad, but the workers are typically restricted to bringing back just one 23 kg suitcase and a 10 kg carry-on. Antex further profits from the collaborators by charging them for transporting cargo back home. These shipments are often "lost."[25] Two hundred collaborators who returned to Cuba after completing their mission in Angola have been waiting since 2021 for their goods (equipment and appliances) for which they each paid Antex $5 to $10 thousand.[26]

A January 31, 2025 update of the investigation by Grimal[27] published by El Toque reports that political persecution and control by State Security has noticeably increased since their investigation of the Angola mission was published in April 2024. Stricter "resolutions" now subject the workers in Angola to more control and punishment.

Cuban doctors and educators working in Angola have recently indicated that their monthly stipend is currently just the equivalent of $100 in local currency, paid at a lower than market rate, and is insufficient to even cover their nutritional requirements. This forces them to take added risk by turning to cheaper but dangerous markets to buy their essentials; they can be robbed and even assaulted (some have been). Antex representatives reportedly tell the workers that Angola is not paying them or is delaying the payments. What's more, the workers in Angola cannot verify if their monthly wages have indeed been deposited in the bank account in Cuba, as they have no access to their account.

Furthermore, Grimal reports that many workers have had their annual one-month vacation in Cuba postponed by many months, others who have completed their mission have been waiting months to travel back home. Antex alleges it has no money to pay for their travel expenses. Because workers may only access their bank account balance when they return to Cuba, that is also pushed back. The delays also impose additional family separation and suffering: children left without a parent or two for very long periods, divorces proliferating, and older parents dying alone. According to Grimal, the bodies of the four collaborators who died in Angola of COVID in 2020-2021 have also yet to be repatriated.

The problems are longstanding. In October 2023, Cuban doctors in Angola had similarly complained[28] that for about five months they had been receiving just 50% of their contractually agreed stipend of $100 in local currency, which was insufficient to cover their expenses. They also reported that their accommodations were "precarious" and that up to three or four collaborators had to live in one room.

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[25] A. Grimal, "Empeora la situación," op. cit. (Of 31 containers sent from Angola during the pandemic, 11 were still on their way by mid 2024.)

[26] A. Grimal, "Misión de Cuba en Angola (I)", op. cit.; and A. Grimal, "Empeora la situación," op. cit.

[27] A. Grimal, "Empeora la situación," op. cit.; "Presidente angolano inaugura hospital," op.cit.; "Primer ministro de Cuba conversó con colaboradores en Angola," op. cit., Díaz-Canel dialogó con cooperantes de Cuba en Angola, Luanda, Prensa Latina, Aug. 20, 2024.

[28] "Un médico cubano destacado en Angola denuncia los malos tratos de Antex, filial de Gaesa," Madrid, *14ymedio*, Oct. 07, 2023.

Many of the members of the medical brigade had been unable to take their vacations due to lacking charter flights and had been told that "the Angolans were not paying the Cuban state company."

Cuba has doubled down on its efforts to enhance "cooperation" with Angola; likely it seeks to export more workers there and/or speed up payment collection from its government if Angola is truly behind in paying. In August 2023, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel visited Angola and signed three bilateral agreements to strengthen cooperation. These included memoranda of understanding in pharmaceutical regulation and investment promotion between their respective economic zones.[29] In August 2024, Díaz-Canel visited again, and in 2024 three more high ranking Cuban officials visited: Prime Minister Manuel Marrero, the president of the National Assembly of People's Power, Esteban Lazo, and Health Minister José Ángel Portal Miranda.[30] In July 2019, Angolan President João Lourenço had paid an official visit to Cuba, signing several bilateral agreements and delivering a lecture at the University of Havana.[31]

Angola not only partners with the Cuban dictatorship in the exploitation of Cuban workers, but also supports the Cuban regime politically, fails to defend the human rights of the Cuban people, and seemingly pays no attention to its strategic interests with the United States in doing so. The Government of Angola maintains a strategic alliance with Cuba particularly in Africa, where it is a regional leader, and Latin American. Angola has consistently supported Cuba in international forums, including in the annual resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly against the US embargo against Cuba. In October 2024, Angola's president inaugurated a modern 200-bed hospital in Cuanza-Sul province hospital, an investment of $66 million,[32] that he named after Raúl Díaz Arguelles, the Cuban military officer sent by Fidel Castro in 1965 to support Marxist guerrilla movements in Africa, particularly in Angola.[33] Cuba's broader strategy of international revolution led to its early involvement in the Angola war against factions backed by the United States.

Meanwhile, since 2022, the US has greatly enhanced its engagement with the Angolan government in multiple areas. In 2023, high-level visits of US officials to Angola included the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Samantha Power, the US International Development Finance Corporation CEO Scott Nathan, and the US Export Import Bank Chair Reta Jo Lewis. The US has delivered extensive and growing assistance to Angola, including military assistance of over $18 million in the four years 2020 to 2023.[34] Just the non-military US assistance to Angola more than covers the totality of Angola's payments to Cuba for their joint exploitation of Cuba's workers on Angolan soil. Just in the last two years US aid, financing, and technical assistance to Angola, among others, includes (mostly from USAID):[35] $1 million to develop transportation infrastructure; $13.3 million in emergency assistance to three provinces affected by drought; $5 million to support agricultural development focused on women smallholder farmers; over $23 million for AIDS Relief in fiscal year 2023 alone; $5 million to address road traffic injuries and deaths; nearly $5 million for a "Mobile Money is Better" project; $10 million from US, local, and international private sector partners spearheaded by USAID to support communities in the Okavango

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[29] "Angola and Cuba open new cycle of cooperation," *Africa-Press – Angola*, Sep. 4, 2023.
[30] A. Grimal, Empeora la situación," op. cit.
[31] "Angolan president visits Cuba," *OnCuba*, Jul. 1, 2019.
[32] "Presidente angolano inaugura hospital Comandante Raúl Díaz Argüelles," *Cuba Debate*, Oct. 21, 2024
[33] "Raúl Díaz Arguelles," Ecured, https://www.ecured.cu/Ra%C3%BAl_D%C3%ADaz_Arg%C3%BCelles
[34] "Fact Sheet: The U.S. – Angola Partnership," U.S. Embassy in Luanda, Dec. 13, 2023.
[35] Summarized from ibid.

Delta; $10.9 million vaccine dose donations; and $4 million bed nets to protect Angolans against malaria. Recently approved US financing to Angola includes $900 million by EXIM Bank for solar projects and $42 million to support the export of FM transmitters, towers, training, and others to Radio Nacional de Angola, as well as $363 million to fund 186 prefabricated bridges. Technical support of unknown monetary value includes CDC training of over 400 Angolan laboratory technicians on HIV and COVID and of over 8,000 health workers to diagnose and treat malaria, US Department of Treasury support to reduce Angola's debt vulnerabilities, and US Geological Survey Institute scientific collaboration to advance Angola's potential as a producer of critical minerals.

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