Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Honduras
February 2024

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 2024

Edited excerpts from "Update on selected countries": Honduras[1]

On February 1, 2024, Honduran authorities announced the arrival of 89 Cuban doctors, expected 20 days later, and the signing of an agreement with Cuba to hire specialized personnel for two years for ophthalmology centers and geriatric hospitals. Following the model successfully entrenched in Uruguay, the director of the National Institute of Retirement and Pensions for Employees and Officials of the Executive Branch, explained that "as a welfare institute, we have adhered to this agreement to enable the geriatrics service for our affiliates nationwide." The agreement included sending 127 general practitioners from Honduras to specialize in Cuba.

Honduras' Minister of Health explained that the Secretariat of Strategic Planning would undertake the hiring. The official communiqué indicated that "the Cuban humanitarian brigade does not affect Honduran doctors, because they are specialists in branches lacking in the country." Yet, the same day, the Honduran Medical Association denounced the dismissal of 30 workers for ideological reasons.

The contingent of 89 Cuban specialists reportedly includes surgeons, orthopedists, neurosurgeons, vascular surgeons, oncological surgeons, internists, psychiatrists, epidemiologists, family physicians, and geriatricians. They will be assigned to the Escuela and Catarino Rivas hospitals in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, the country's two main cities.

In January 2022, Xiomara Castro, an ally of the Government of Cuba, became President of Honduras. In August 2022, the arrival of a brigade of 86 Cuban health professionals on September 1st was announced in the context of Cuba-Honduras agreements for projects in health. These included a collaboration to produce in Honduras medicines with Cuban technology (a national laboratory of generic medicines and Covid vaccines) and the ophthalmologic program Operation Miracle.

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[1] Sources were consulted for this summary include: "Firmaron Cuba y Honduras acuerdo en el sector educativo," *Granma*, 28 de diciembre de 2022; "El opositor Partido Nacional de Honduras califica de 'injerencia ideológica' la labor de maestros cubanos en ese país," Madrid, *Diario de Cuba*, Jan. 12, 2023; "Comitiva cubana llega al país para evaluar el programa de alfabetización "Yo sí puedo"," Tegucigalpa, *El Heraldo*, 10 de abril 2023; "No es solidaridad y Cuba vende bien caro a Honduras su programa de maestros," Madrid, *14ymedio*, Mar. 29, 2023; "Las alcaldías de los lugares de destino deberán proveer a los maestros 'habitación, casa y algunos utensilios'," Tegucigalpa, *Diario de Cuba*, Jan. 19, 2023; Mayle González Mirabal, "Polémica en Honduras por la contratación de casi un centenar de médicos cubanos," *Martí Noticias*, Nov. 22, 2023; "Honduras consolida su alianza con Cuba con la contratación de otros 89 médicos," Madrid, *14ymedio*, Feb. 2, 2024; "Activistas respaldan presencia de brigada médica de Cuba en Honduras," Tegucigalpa, Cuba Minrex, May 6, 2020; Martha Ríos, "Médicos cubanos recibirán alta distinción de Congreso de Honduras," La Habana, *Radio Habana Cuba*, Aug. 14, 2020; "En suspenso contratación de médicos cubanos en Honduras," *MartiNoticias*, May 7, 2019.

The announcement generated strong criticism from local medical associations and political parties. The president of the Honduran Medical Association (CMH), Helga Codina, explained that some 11,000 professionals registered with the CMH were unemployed and declared that the CMH was totally opposed to these political decisions. She told the media: "If they want to help, the ones they have to help are their own country, their own doctors." In November 2022, Codina denounced that Cubans were arriving without informing the CMH, a professional body, and pointing to the risks of not being able to verify that the Cubans were really doctors, reporting that two or three local doctors could be paid for the cost of each Cuban. She also said that many were giving consultations and that problems of mismanagement had been detected.

In December 2022, a brigade of 123 Cuban teachers was deployed throughout Honduras' municipalities. Honduran newspapers with access to the Cuba-Honduras agreement reported that it was signed between on October 21, 2022, and was for three years, until 2025. The Government of Honduras was to pay Cuba 50 million lempiras a year, of which around 25% would go to the monthly payments of the 123 Cuban teachers. 10,000 lempiras per month (about $405) would be disbursed to pay the stipends of each of the 123 Cuban teachers, or around 40 million lempiras ($1.6 million) in the three years.

The Cuban teachers were hired to implement "Yo Sí Puedo," a literacy method created in Cuba and exported to some 43 countries, and the goal was to teach 700,000 people to read and write. The state-controlled Granma reported a twitter from Cuba's embassy in Tegucigalpa that Cuba and Honduras had signed an Accord for "Cubans with doctorates in Education will advise in the re-foundation of the Honduran educational system." Experts in Honduras warned that "if the roles are not properly agreed upon," indoctrination could creep into the counseling. The program has raised public controversy since its announcement. Politicians and academics reject the initiative, recommending hiring unemployed local teachers to implement existing Honduran programs such as Educatodos and the Adult Literacy Program in Honduras (Alfacit). The opposition, led by the National Party of Honduras (PNH), called it "Cuban interference," "ideological interference," and "shady deals."

Background. The first Cuban medical brigades arrived Honduras after Hurricane Fifi in 1974 and returned in 1998 in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. The Honduran government signed 2-year agreements since 1998 to contract Cuba's medical services until the last accord expired April 30, 2019. The Cuban regime was reportedly paid around a thousand dollars per month for each doctor, who in turn earned between $350 and $400. Some of the Cubans stayed in Honduras, apparently defecting from the mission or staying after its end. In 2020, the Honduran Congress unanimously approved a proposal of the leftist Liberty and Refoundation Party (Libre) to hire a Cuban medical brigade during the Covid pandemic. The brigade of 20 collaborators from April to September 2020 was composed of a dozen nurses, four physicians, an epidemiologist, the head of the brigade, and a logistician. In December 2020, a team of 25 collaborators was in Honduras for three months to assist victims of tropical storms.

Editorial note of Feb. 2025: The US government provided Honduras $194 million in humanitarian assistance in 2023. See https://www.foreignassistance.gov/cd/honduras/

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