Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Kenya

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

Excerpts from "Update on selected countries' medical brigades": Kenya

Last year's information submission for the TIP report included a profile on Kenya with details of its agreement with Cuba for the deployment of around 100 Cuban doctors beginning 2018 and specialized training for 50 Kenyan doctors in Cuba for 3 years starting in 2021. It described how the Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists, and Dentists Union (KMPPDU) fought the agreement from the start and how, after five years of persistent efforts and eventual support in the Parliament, the Government of Kenya finally caved and announced it was cancelling the agreement with Cuba.[1]

The Cuban medical brigade was to fly home sometime in the Spring of 2024, when the contract ended. No news has been found confirming this, but the Cuban government would have naturally concealed it as much as possible and the government of Kenya was no doubt relieved to move on from the scandal. If the Cuban doctors had not left Kenya in 2024, it is safe to assume that the KMPPDU would have reported it. The training of Kenyan doctors in Cuba had also been denounced as a waste of human resources, as they must undergo two years of additional training before the medical board can allow them to practice in Kenya. For their part, the doctor trainees in Cuba have also denounced the deplorable conditions on the Island and their insufficient stipend of just $350 a month. It is unknown if this aspect of the collaboration was also cancelled.

To summarize, since the bilateral agreement was announced in 2017, the KMPPDU denounced that it made no sense, given that several thousand Kenyan doctors were unemployed. It filed a lawsuit in 2018, but it was dismissed by a court in Nairobi. Over the years, it denounced the Cuban doctors inadequate training and cases of malpractice. In 2019, the Ministry of Health had to require that local doctors accompany the Cubans (apparently poorly trained) "to guarantee the advisory aspects of the collaboration."[2] An eventual parliamentary investigation revealed that the monthly compensation paid to Cuba for each doctor ($5,300) was up to three times higher than what local doctors earned ($1,600 to $2,300). (Of course, the Cuban doctors were receiving 20% of the compensation, at best.) Additionally, Kenya was spending around $9,200 per month per doctor in benefits that local doctors did not receive, such as accommodations, utilities, travel, health insurance, and indemnity insurance; plus, each Cuban medical team had security, a vehicle with a driver, and translators. The bilateral

[1] Derrick Okubasu, "Govt blocks foreign medical graduates from interning in Kenya," *Kenyans*, Jan. 24, 2024; Charles Ebikeme, "Kenya scraps controversial doctor exchange programme with Cuba," *Mail & Guardian*, Dec. 12, 2023.

[2] "Ministerio de Salud de Kenia emite orden sobre médicos cubanos que molesta a doctores locales," *Radio Televisión Martí*, Sep. 10, 2019.

agreements also had clauses pointing to the trafficking, such as a local government agreement to deny the Cubans residence or work in the public health system outside the arrangement and holding Kenya responsible to pay for repatriation of doctors disciplined at Cuba's discretion.

What happened with the Cuban medical brigade in Kenya is worth noting. The irrational scheme is repeated in other countries whose governments allege needing the Cuban doctors, concealing what is essentially an assistance program for the Cuban dictatorship to extract funds, propaganda, influence, and intelligence, at hidden costs to the local population. It took a persistent campaign by a local organization, with help from opposition members of parliament in the, and media coverage to have the agreement cancelled.

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www.CubaArchive.org
Free Society Project, Inc.
info@CubaArchive.org

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