Update on Cuba's Medical Mission in Venezuela
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

Excerpts from "Update on selected countries": Venezuela

In the last 2-3 years, official sources and state media from Cuba and Venezuela have mostly avoided reporting the number of collaborators in the medical mission in Venezuela. In 2020 to 2022, Cuba had reported "more than 22,000," "more than 20,000," and "more than 19,000," in descending order over time.[1] In December 2023, Cuba's state media reported that 13,000 were part of the Cuban medical brigade and 161,000 health collaborators had served in Venezuela to date. In March 2023 the Ministry of Foreign Relations of both Cuba and Venezuela reported that 260,000 Cuban collaborators had served in Venezuela, undertaking 480 projects in strategic sectors such as health, education, culture, sports, energy and others.[2] Cuba's Ministry of Health also reported 671 Cuban brigades, 23 of which were located in remote areas and border points and present in 572 Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers, 586 rehabilitation rooms, and 35 high technology centers.[3]

Conditions in Venezuela for the Cuban workers described in greater detail in prior periods have not improved. If anything, they have continued to worsen. Venezuela is a hardship assignment that in recent years has been mandated by Cuban authorities before workers are allowed to serve in more appealing international missions. Once they arrive, their passports are typically retained by supervisors and those caught trying to flee are arrested and sent back to Cuba, threatened with prison sentences of up to eight years. Cuban and Venezuelan soldiers guard the border crossings to prevent the Cubans from abandoning their missions.

Many of the Cuban workers in Venezuela live and work in very dangerous crime-infested neighborhoods where firearms constantly go off and live in awful conditions, especially in the Amazonian jungle. At most neighborhood clinics or small hospitals, known as CDI (*Centros Diagnósticos Integrales*), where most Cuban doctors practice in the cities, there is usually no equipment for diagnosis

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[1] José Llamos Camejo and Yudy Castro Morales, "Como parte de su agenda oficial en esta nación, el Primer Ministro intercambió con colaboradores y empresarios presentes en tierra bolivariana," *Granma*, May 10, 2022; Yosdany Morejón Ortega, "Inmunizados más del 95% de los colaboradores cubanos en Venezuela," Cuba Debate, Mar. 31, 2021; Jorge Pérez Cruz, Así honran a Fidel colaboradores cubanos en Venezuela, *Trabajadores*, Aug. 12, 2020.

[2] "Venezuela podrá contar siempre con Cuba," Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, República de Cuba, Caracas, Mar. 6, 2023; Evelio Carmenate Cisneros, "Misión Médica cubana en Venezuela: dos décadas llevando salud en defensa de la vida," Colaboración Médica Cubana en el Exterior, República Bolivariana de Venezuela, Mar. 7, 2023.

[3] "Misión Médica cubana en Venezuela: dos décadas llevando salud en defensa de la vida," Ministerio de Salud Pública, República de Cuba, Mar. 7, 2023.

and almost nothing to treat patients. This has led to several suicides and preventable deaths, as doctors who develop cancer and other illnesses go untreated.

The compensation package is particularly dire and the miserly per diems the workers receive are insufficient to cover basic needs; many collaborators arrive from Cuba for their mission in Venezuela with food in their suitcases (rice, pasta, and other staples) and survive with money sent from their families in Cuba and patients' gifts. They faced great ethical dilemmas, as they must alter statistics and are forced to use expired vaccines and medication.

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