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By Johana Tablada de la Torre

The U.S. State Department is circulating a new document to put pressure on the countries that have requested Cuban medical brigades or collaboration agreements.

The pamphlet released by the State Department, blatantly entitled "The truth about Cuba's medical missions," is full of lies.

Washington's intentions seem to be directed at hiding the failure of its campaign launched more than a year ago, to end Cuba's international cooperation to any country, which implies their willingness to perform any action in order to distort the nature of the cooperation and present it as something that is not. Instead, the opposite has happened.

This deplorable material also aims to divert attention from the widespread assessment of the United States government regarding the unsatisfactory handling of the pandemic at a national and multilateral levels.

A year ago, John Bolton promised to put an end to the "myths" of the Cuban Revolution, that is to say, our brilliant health system, along with a reinforcement of the financial blockade. Besides, he also pledged to shatter the romantic characteristics of the Cuban Revolution, and to suspend travel to Cuba, as well as the sources of income for our economy. It's worth recalling the full enforcement of the Helms-Burton Act, the elimination of the already limited cruise trips, the reduction of flights and the number of tourists from the United States, as well as the persecution of the fuel that Cuba purchases on the international market, among many other desperate measures.

They succeeded in implementing what depended on them only. Just in 2019 alone, 86 new embargo measures were applied, causing great harm to Cuba and hindering our ability to respond to COVID-19 as we could in other conditions. Nevertheless, we are efficiently reacting to the disease.

However, ending the myth of the Cuban health system and the supportive cooperation with other countries has turned into something impossible for them. There are several decades of constant efforts and tangible results that validate this statement. Their vile slanders -- embedded in very well-funded campaigns -- still confuse many people; but also enhance the achievements of the contribution of the sanitary personnel and the actual nature and scope of the Cuban Public Health system.

The U.S. campaign directed to justify the blockade policy that has no legal or moral support, has been a resounding failure.

The fact is that these medical cooperations are even broader today, and are being recognized worldwide for the professional and human quality rendered by our doctors in every country. The extent of these results could be higher if Cuba's priority was not to guarantee protection and medical attention to its population, also victim of the pandemic. We are unable to meet all the demands; but still, the country counts with many more doctors and nurses willing to participate in cooperative missions.

Today, several countries request Cuban medical services in different modalities due to the positive experiences gathered throughout the years.

None of these missions can be considered as human trafficking or slave trade, as the U.S. tries to portray, which has only proved that their purposes are far from those proclaimed by the State Department. Once again, they demonstrated the actual importance they give to the fight against the international crime, a fight in which Cuba stands out with an exemplary performance.

The State Department is aware of the Cuban behavior, after witnessing five rounds of bilateral exchange to cooperate in the fight against this scourge in the past. But Trump's handing over the Cuban regulatory policy to the most reactionary personalities in the anti-Cuban lobby also represented a step back in diplomatic relations.

United Nations officials in charge of fighting human trafficking have never corroborated Washington's statements. It represents an offense to every Cuban, and eventually, affects only the credibility of whoever believes in it.

Instead, Cuban Medical brigades are often being considered for awards, distinctions, recognitions and even nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Despite the fact that the United States government managed to force the cessation of the medical services provided by Cuba to Bolivia and Brazil, places where they orchestrated coups d'état, the vast majority of countries rejected the threats and sanctions imposed by the group that leads the Cuba policy

at the White House. These actions shamed many U.S. diplomats who also know, through direct experience in countries where they had previously worked, the positive contribution and prestige of Cuba's medical missions. Never before has the morale of American diplomacy, dedicated to destroy the achieved solidarity, been lower.

Life and time will prove that those doctors who were called spies and political activists were actually brilliant doctors, that provided assistance to millions of people and saved many lives. Just a few, are not certain that the United States directed, politicized, and manipulated the campaign of harassment and violence that led to the abandonment of the Cuban medical mission in Bolivia, and the consequent loss of valuable services that were daily provided to the poorest communities.

Cuban doctors felt doubly offended, inasmuch they were accused, and at the same time, their physical integrity was at risk. The slanderers accused them of not providing sanitary assistance to the population, but operating in the political issues of the country instead. Far much serious was the unprecedented decision of the State Department to lead the operation of the kidnapping of doctors, house searches and illegal arrests, as shown in documented videos and photographs, and which Cuba promptly denounced.

That same crude campaign is being reissued today by the United States and the oligarchies in some countries that requested the collaboration of Cuban doctors to fight COVID-19.

Ever since the pandemic began to ravage the world, 24 Cuban medical brigades have traveled to other countries in response to their request for help. In addition, Cuban medical brigades were already working in 59 countries before this health emergency appeared, with more than 28,000 collaborators.

Several doctors, nurses and health workers have left Cuba in these weeks to travel to more than 20 countries, for instance, Italy, Andorra, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Suriname, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Granada, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Haiti, Barbados, Qatar, Angola, Andorra, South Africa, Honduras, among others.

Concerning the already permanent and embarrassing slander that Cuba exploits its doctors, it is important to remark that our government fully pays in Cuba the salaries to doctors while serving in other countries, to which they volunteer to travel on the basis of individual agreements. Additionally, they receive an extra payment in the host country.

I personally witnessed their hard and conscious work in Belize and Portugal, and I feel extremely proud of that. In both countries, doctors were free to move anywhere, and were most of the time alone, away from their colleagues and from home. In several communities they were the only doctor available, and worked without the supervision of Cuban officials, in places where other local doctors would not reach, or there was a severe lack of medical personnel. Everyday, Cuban brigades offered a well appreciated service and earned the respect of the population and other health institutions of the host country, to which they mingled to create a single Health team; also learning daily from them and they from us.

Cuba is not a rich country. We have limited resources and suffer from a heinous blockade that affects the entire population, with no distinction in the public, cooperative or private sector. The main goal of the United States is to suffocate the Cuban economy and establish a government that will promote their interests.

It is common knowledge that some countries with greater financial resources pay for these medical services. But also, in some cases, due to catastrophes or great need, where the economic resources scarce, the host country assumes only the expenses of the Cuban medical personnel in its territory, without paying anything to the counterparts or medical entities of Cuba. So it happened in Central America after Hurricane Mitch and also in Italy, due to the emergency created by COVID-19. There are other examples of generous selfless support, such as the assistance of the Henry Reeve Brigade after earthquakes in Pakistan, Haiti, Chile and Peru, the offer for help to the United States after Hurricane Katrina, the well

known Operacion Milagro and many other examples.

On the other hand, in the countries where income is received by mutual agreement, since there are great resources and lack of medical personnel, a part of the revenues is devoted to Cuba's budget. The individual contract with the doctor, clarifies what the personal income is, and also specifies that a share of the money is destined as a contribution to help sustain the free and universal public health system of Cuba, which they also enjoy. This is also the procedure in other sectors of Cuba that generate convertible currency for everyone's social spending. It is shameful that the United States is more disturbed by a country that bears a financial blockade and manages to guarantee full access to services and respect human rights; than other countries where only the exclusive minority can pay for these privileges. They don't make reference in any statement to the education system in Cuba, where the university and medical studies are free, and this is exactly what millions of people are claiming today in the world.

The United States, the country that blocks Cuba's public health system and tries hard to strangle our economy and income of any type -- including those from pharmaceutical and biotechnological exports or medical services -- has no place trying to understand the nature of our cooperation schemes. And it represents an extreme act of hypocrisy to pretend they are concerned for the wages of those they despise and attack every day with any type of insults and sanctions.

The monetary contribution of Cuba's medical services, legal in any United Nations South-South cooperation scheme, allows to acquire costly supplies for the entire population, including diagnostic tests, supplies for the pharmaceutical and biotechnological industry of Cuba, medicines to treat cancer, etc. These are resources to which doctors that work abroad and their families have also free access.

We live in a country where most of its citizens work in unison to improve the lives of everyone, and not just a few. So it is in each sector; and it is not a secret that Cuban wages are low, nor is it a secret that other expensive services are free in Cuba, which along with the health service, represents more than 80 percent of the spending of any family in the world.

No one is forced to live in Cuba, emigration is a recognized right, and a minority cannot impose the majority to live in another society, or vice versa, much less a foreign government giving voice and funds to their favorite Cuban followers, to put together a simulated "opposition" disciplined and built under the laws of Washington, a state that has not met with the respect of the Cuban people for representing the interests of the country that condemns them. Few things better describe Cuban history more than the fight to free ourselves from the yoke of a foreign country.

In exchange for visas and many times unfulfilled promises, the United States government has managed to get a minority of doctors to speak out against the program in which tens of thousand voluntarily remain. Some have gone to Congress to visit Marco Rubio and take a selfie photo to give a realistic content to the slander.

Several doctors have been victims of blackmail, and encouraged by programs like the Medical Parole, have abandoned their missions in exchange for certain benefits. And at the expense of the populations they served and the country that trained them to comply with these assignments. Some have even gone so far as to say every single thing that can only be created in the imaginary world of those who protect them. All is left to say by them is that Cuban doctors eat children.

Many of us are aware of the altruism and sensibility of women and men who make up Cuba's medical brigades.

I also know many Cuban doctors who legally chose to live outside Cuba, in developed societies, after completing their missions, because they were attracted by better wages and conditions for themselves and their families. Others have stayed abroad for love. The vast majority are doctors who will never raise their hands to request an increase of the blockade, nor will attack the public health system of the country

that trained and prepared them to work abroad; the country where his colleagues still live and exercise this profession, the country that bravely bears a blockade. Today, they are also Cuban doctors fighting COVID-19. Most of their family members live here, receive free medical treatment and cope with the adversity of living in a country that has been denied by the U.S., the opportunity to breathe and evolve without abusive measures or pressure, intervention or slander campaigns.

The United States deceives and threatens human solidarity in calling the medical cooperation, an act of exploitation and human trafficking.

The United States spends more money than any other country in the world for a paralyzed healthcare system dominated by the private business of the insurance companies, which cannot provide decent services for 28 million uninsured people, and the other 50 million count with incomplete services or faulty profit-based health insurance programs.

Health should not be a business. Access to medical care is a human right. The United States deliberately misleads the world population by attacking the international medical cooperation.

Our experience is based on the notion that the access to health care is a human right, and that guaranteeing such access is an obligation of all States endowed with a minimum sense of social justice.

In our country, that obligation is asserted in the Constitution. A small country like Cuba, with limited resources and wealth, and victim of a brutal economic blockade, can only achieve these remarkable health indicators that the world celebrates today, thanks to the commitment and the firm political will of the government. This is how we have been able to provide our population with health services and social well-being comparable to the advanced societies, and we are certain we could achieve more if there were not such a brutal blockade that suffocates our economy and constitutes the main obstacle to the development of Cuba and its people, beyond our known weaknesses.

Cuba has around 100,000 active doctors. Over the past 60 years, almost 380,000 graduated from medicine; and 35,600 doctors and health workers from 138 countries have been trained in Cuba free of charge. The graduates with scholarships from the Latin American School of Medicine are currently saving lives in many countries.

We have a number of agreements, exchanges and the respect of our medical and scientific communities willing to collaborate for the well being of our peoples and the international community.

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