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CUBA: The aura of the Cuban doctors smashed in the European Parliament

The aura of the 'famous' Cuban doctors smashed in the European Parliament

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

European Times (09.02.2023) – Cuban doctors and healthcare personnel assigned to work abroad are victims of human trafficking and exploitation similar to slavery by their own state, declared MEP Javier Nart (Spain/ Renew Europe Political Group) when he opened the conference on this issue he was hosting in the European Parliament on 8 February.

For decades, Cuban doctors have been surrounded by an exceptional but undeserved aura from which the image of the country has largely benefitted. The guest speakers invited to testify with concrete facts have indeed shed a very different light on the reality hidden in the shadow of the Cuban propaganda. The so-called international Socialist solidarity with poor countries conceals very serious systemic labor and human rights violations as it was already highlighted by two resolutions of the European Parliament.

Resolutions of the European Parliament

On [10 June 2021](#) (Recital I, Article 10), the Parliament stressed that

“Resolution 168 of 2010 of the Ministry of International Trade and Foreign Investment of Cuba, imposes on all civil employees abroad who work for the state or for state-owned enterprises, including medical personnel, unjustified duties and obligations that violate human dignity and the most basic and fundamental human rights; whereas all civil employees who do not finish medical missions or decide not to go back to Cuba are punished under the Cuban Penal Code with eight years in prison; whereas these medical missions have been classified as

a modern form of slavery according to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the statement of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (CUB6/2019) on the Cuban medical missions underscored the precarious and inhumane working conditions of the medical personnel, allegations that were supported by Human Rights Watch and 622 testimonies”

and condemned

“the systemic labour and human rights violations committed by the Cuban state against its healthcare personnel assigned to work abroad on the medical missions, which are in breach of core ILO conventions ratified by Cuba; urges Cuba to effectively implement and comply with the American Convention on Human Rights and ILO Conventions 29 and 105 respectively; calls on the Cuban Government to ensure the right of Cubans to exit and return to their country, including for doctors deployed in medical missions abroad, in line with international human rights standards; calls on the Cuban Government to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to ensure the rights to freedom of association, including the registration of organisations, and collective bargaining, in line with ILO standards.”

This condemnation was reiterated in another resolution of the Parliament adopted on [16 September 2021](#) (Recital M).

Working conditions of Cuban doctors

Cuba’s practices have a dramatic impact on the lives of its

overseas workers who only get 5 to 20% of the salary mentioned in their contracts that governments or foreign companies pay for them. Indeed, the Cuban state keeps the rest as fees to organizations depending on the Cuban Communist Party. This form of exploitation has been copied and pasted from the North Korean system of exploitation of tens of thousands of their workers in dozens of countries, such as Russia, China and even until a very recent past in the Polish shipyards of Gdansk.

When the Cuban doctors arrive at their country of destination, their passports are immediately confiscated. They are not allowed either to travel with their legalized diplomas to avoid defection. They are not allowed to get married with a local resident and they have to inform their superior about any local love relationship. This scheme is very similar to trafficking and prostitution carried out by mafia groups anywhere around the world.

The Cuban Law on Labor Regulations contains a number of disciplinary measures for civilian overseas workers who may violate a long list of internal rules, such as participating in local social events without authorization, leaving the country without authorization, traveling in the country without authorization, living with unauthorized persons, and so on.

When they realize that they are exploited by their own state and dare 'defect', they are considered deserters by the Havana.

Article 176.1 of the Penal Code of Cuba provides that three to

eight years in prison will be imposed on anybody failing to go back home at the end of his mission or abandoning it before the end. A declaration of "Abandonment of Mission" considering him a deserter is then sent to all State institutions; he subsequently loses all his properties in Cuba and is denied entry to Cuba for a period of eight years. However, almost nobody tries to go back to Cuba because of the risk to be persecuted and imprisoned. It is estimated that more than 5,000 parents were unable to see their children for at least 8 years.

Magnitude of the human exploitation

It is estimated that 50,000 to 100,000 civilian professionals in Cuba are concerned every year and according to governmental sources, the total number of overseas workers (teachers, engineers, seafarers, artists, athletes...) is close to one million out of a population of 11-12 million.

Their work generates \$8.5 billion while tourism only brings \$2.9 billion.

In more than 50 years, over a hundred countries have hosted such Cuban assistance.

Are they volunteers?

A survey by Prisoners Defenders revealed that overseas workers were not volunteers but their decision was motivated by their

extreme misery, their precarious labor conditions, the fear of retaliation for saying “no” or their indebtedness.

32% signed a contract and obtained a copy of it, 35% did not receive a copy and for 33% of the workers a contract was not presented to them.

69,24% did not know the final destination (city, hospital, etc.) or defaulted upon arrival in the destination country.

All these facts were provided and discussed by Javier Larrondo, president of [Prisoners Defenders](#), Leonel Rodriguez Alvarez, Cuban doctor (online), Juan Pappier, deputy director at the Americas Division of Human Rights Watch, and Hugo Acha, senior researcher at the [Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba](#) (FHRC).



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