



Glasgow, 29 September 2020

Dear Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee

Dear Mrs. Berit Reiss-Andersen, Chair.

Subject: Nobel Peace Prize nomination for the Henry Reeve International Medical Contingent

Having researched the development of Cuba's public healthcare system and its 'medical internationalism', I appeal to the Nobel Committee to break the silence about this incredible record by awarding the Henry Reeve International Medical Contingent the Nobel Peace Prize. Who can deserve this recognition more than the Cuban medical specialists who make such huge personal sacrifices, leaving behind their family and homes, their culture and communities, to work in challenging and risky conditions for months or even years?

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 400,000 Cuban medical professionals had *already* served overseas in 164 countries since 1960, providing healthcare that is free at the point of delivery. Almost nothing has been said about them by politicians and the mainstream media. And what an impact they have had! Literally, millions of lives have been saved and hundreds of millions of lives improved. By 2014, Cuban medical professionals had performed 1.2 billion consultations overseas, attended 2.2 million births and performed over 8 million surgeries. This is the fruit of a welfare-based development model which promotes collaboration over competition and in which international solidarity is upheld as the highest expression of humanity. These principles are imbued in Cuba's education and healthcare systems.

The four elements of Cuban medical internationalism were initiated early in the 1960s and continue today: emergency response medical brigades sent overseas; the establishment abroad of public health apparatus to provide free healthcare for local residents; foreign patients brought to Cuba for free medical treatment; and medical training for foreigners, both in Cuba and overseas. The phenomena began in May 1960 when Valdivia in Chile was struck by the most powerful earthquake ever recorded. Thousands were killed. Despite the exodus of Cuban doctors after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and strained diplomatic relations with the government of Chile, the Cubans sent an emergency medical brigade with six rural field hospitals. In 1963, 55 Cuban healthcare professionals went to newly independent Algeria to help establish a national health system.

This unparalleled contribution to global health has continued for 60 years; culminating with the Henry Reeve International Medical Contingents treating Covid-19 patients around the world in 2020. The brigades operate under four principles: that healthcare is a human right to be defended and exercised; that peace is a human right to be promoted; that humanism means contributing to global development and healthcare; that solidarity and collaboration between peoples and nations is essential. Your Committee can exalt these principles by awarding them the Nobel Peace Prize.



The Henry Reeve International Medical Contingents

In late August 2005, Hurricane Katrina battered Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama in the United States. Within hours, Cuba offered to send three field hospitals and medical personnel to treat the victims. By 4 September there were 1,586 Cuban volunteer healthcare professionals ready to leave for the disaster zone. The brigade was named the Henry Reeve Contingent in honour of a young US citizen who fought with Cuban forces in the war for independence from Spain (1868-1878). The Cubans were well placed to provide emergency assistance in those conditions: without clean water, electricity or sophisticated diagnostic equipment. Between 1960 and 2005, 30 Cuban emergency medical brigades had served in 19 countries in similar situations. Tragically, their offer of medical assistance was ignored by US President George Bush.

There was no shortage of need, however, and the Henry Reeve Contingent was despatched first to Guatemala following Hurricane Stan in October 2005, which killed 1,482 people, and then days later to Pakistan-administered Kashmir following the earthquake that killed 80,000 people and left 3.3 million homeless. Over the next seven months 2,400 Cuban healthcare workers treated 1.7 million patients in 32 field hospitals they subsequently donated Pakistan, despite the countries not having diplomatic relations. In February 2006, the Henry Reeve Contingent rushed to Bolivia with 20 mobile hospitals to assist the 50,000 rural families affected by heavy flooding. As the disasters continued, so did the Henry Reeve Contingent.

In January 2010, a catastrophic earthquake hit Haiti, killing 230,000 people and leaving 15% of the population homeless. The Henry Reeve Contingent arrived within 24 hours, joining the 344 Cuban medical professionals already working in Haiti, alongside hundreds of Haitian physicians trained at Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine (known as ELAM), set up in 1999. Cuban-Haitian medical cooperation had been initiated 11 years earlier following Hurricane Georges in 1998. By 1 April 2010, another 748 Cubans had arrived, along with 481 Haitian graduates from ELAM and 278 ELAM graduates from 28 other countries. Compounding Haiti's woes, in October 2010 an outbreak of cholera began. The Cubans established cholera treatment centres and oral rehydration posts, set up tent-by-tent examinations and launched a public health campaign.

In 2014, during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa when the WHO called for 'compassionate doctors and nurses, who will know how to comfort patients despite the barriers of wearing PPE [personal protective equipment] and working under very demanding conditions', Cuba was first to respond and sent the largest medical contingent. 256 Cuban healthcare professionals, all with previous experience of responding to natural disasters and disease outbreaks in developing countries, went to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, countries where Cuban medical missions already operated. They quickly reduced the mortality rate from 50% to 20% and introduced public health campaigns. The Cuban effort was internationally praised; US President Barack Obama said that: 'American and Cuban health care workers should work side by side to stop the spread of this deadly disease.'



In 2017, Cuba's Henry Reeve Contingent received a WHO Public Health Prize. At the time of this nomination in September 2020, there have been 71 brigades of the Henry Reeve Contingents; 46 of them in 2020 alone to fight Covid-19; three to tackle the Ebola epidemic in 2014, two to combat the cholera outbreak in Haiti and 20 to respond to natural disasters around the world since 2005.

The importance of awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to Cuba's Henry Reeve Contingents

In the United States, Donald Trump's administration has led a competitive stampede by rich nations to secure themselves PPE, ventilators, drugs and vaccines at the cost of other nations. It has defunded the WHO, blamed China for the virus, and undermined every principle of global peace and cooperation. Even the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in his speech to the United Nations on 26 September, admitted that: 'after nine months of fighting COVID-19, the very notion of the international community looks, frankly, pretty tattered...' Now was the time, he said, 'for humanity to reach across borders and repair these ugly rifts. Let's heal the world – literally and metaphorically.' This is precisely what Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade has been doing throughout the pandemic: healing the world. But Johnson was silent on the Cuban counterexample. A Nobel Peace Prize would break the silence and promote an alternative *modus operandi* for global cooperation in healthcare.

History shows us that with recognition or without, Cuba will continue to fight for global healthcare through its Henry Reeve Contingents and other forms of medical internationalism. It has stepped up its efforts in 2020, despite a severe deterioration of economic conditions on the island, resulting from external factors. In 2019 alone, the Trump administration introduced 86 new sanctions against Cuba; to starve the country of revenue, scare off foreign partners, create scarcity and obstruct oil shipments from Venezuela. It has waged a campaign to cut off revenues to the Cuban state from its medical services exports, without regard for the lives lost, and to block US tourism to the island. The US blockade cost Cuba \$4 billion in 2019. In 2020, the situation has been compounded by the freeze in international tourism due to the Covid-19 lockdown and the fall in remittances. US sanctions have prevented Cuba from purchasing or receiving donations of medicines and medical equipment needed to treat Covid-19 patients at home.

Despite this, Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade proves that cooperation and solidarity are viable alternatives in a world plagued by conflicts and oppression. The Nobel Prize Committee has an excellent opportunity to demonstrate what characteristics it wishes to promote. I hope you will heed the international clamour for a kinder and fairer future and award Cuba's epidemiological internationalists the Nobel Peace Prize.

Yours sincerely,

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