COVID-19 pandemic: PAHO's recommendations and Cuba's response

By: RHC
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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has called for urgent action in countries across the Americas to cope with the influx of covid-19 cases.

"With many countries of the Americas now reporting community transmission of COVID-19, there is still a short window of time for governments to slow the spread of the virus, reduce the impact on health systems and save lives," said the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Carissa F. Etienne, during a media briefing earlier this week.

She called for solidarity among nations and peoples: "solidarity in our region has never had deeper meaning than it does today. The only way out of this situation will be if everyone does his/her part, while supporting others.

"Countries must work together – sharing resources, expertise and making joint decisions that accelerate access to health services, promote research and innovation, and increase our ability to cope. PAHO will continue, she said, as it always has, to help facilitate exchanges between countries, guided by two pillars: the scientific evidence driving the global response to COVID-19 and the solidarity among nations and peoples."

Caribbean nations reporting confirmed cases of COVID-19 include Aruba, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curaçao, the Dominican Republic, French Guiana, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Martinique, Saint Barthelemy, St Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Martin, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Puerto Rico, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.

In an effort to contain the rapid spread of the deadly disease, regional governments have been urging residents to stay at home. Others have imposed nighttime curfews, as it is the case of Jamaica, tourism shutdowns, travel bans, school closures, etc.

Amidst the current crisis, Cuba has been sending medical contingents of its Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade to assist nations, in the Caribbean region and beyond.

The Henry Reeve Brigade was created in 2005 by Revolution leader Fidel Castro to provide health services to Americans after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, only to be refused by the then George W. Bush administration.

Today, Cuba has contingents of its Henry Reeve Brigade in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Dominica, Jamaica, St Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in two European nations, Andorra and Italy, where Cuban and Chinese health workers have been helping the locals in the hard-hit Lombardy region.

Cuban authorities have repeatedly said that sending medical brigades to assist other nations in these difficult times, does not, in any way, undermine the protection of and care for Cuban patients of COVID-19 and the Cuban population in general, as the country has enough resources, including more than 95 thousand trained doctors.

About Cuba's humanitarian missions abroad to fight COVID-19, Marcia Cobas, Cuba's deputy minister of public health, told Xinhua news agency: "Only solidarity among peoples can be effective to combat coronavirus globally."

Santiago Badia, general secretary of Cuba's Health Workers Union, said 45 countries have so far asked the Caribbean nation for support to confront the new coronavirus.

He noted that over half a million Cuban health professionals have expressed their readiness to assist, if necessary, nations hit by the pandemic.

Despite hardships at home caused by Washington's decades-long economic blockade, revolutionary Cuba has always been ready and willing to assist other nations and peoples in need, sharing whatever little it has.

Currently, more than 28,000 Cuban health professionals are offering their services abroad on existing cooperation agreements with 58 countries. Those Cuban professionals are on the frontlines, fighting side by side with their peers in those countries against the pandemic.

"It just goes to the history of Cuba's deep and long-lasting commitment to humanitarian solidarity with other countries," Peter Kornbluh, director of the Cuba Documentation Project of the National Security Archive at George Washington University told Democracy Now.

Kornbluh further stated: "We are in a fight against a common enemy, and Cuba is a country that can make a significant contribution to that struggle. And Cuba should not be hamstrung and handicapped by U.S. sanctions."

Cuba's contribution to the current global battle against COVID-19 is not limited to its highly-skilled health professionals. Cuba's antiviral drug, recombinant Interferon Alpha 2B is among 30 medications being used to treat covid-19 patients, particularly in China.

A product of Cuba's BioCubaFarma Group, over the past weeks, Cuba has received formal requests for Interferon Alpha 2B from several countries, most notably Italy, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Authorities with the Cuban biopharmaceutical industry stressed that the country is working on the production of this and other drugs, to not only treat, but also prevent the deadly disease.