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**US slammed for stance on Cuban medical teams**

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A recent U.S bill that threatens to impose sanctions on countries that hire Cuban nurses has raised the ire of Barbados' Ambassador to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) David Comissiong who is urging the regional grouping to develop a collective response.

The Cut Profits to the Cuban Regime Act, introduced earlier this month by Florida's Republican Senator Rick Scott would require the State Department to consider countries that contract healthcare workers through the Cuban government in their ranking in its annual Trafficking in Persons report. Senator Ted Cruz and Cuban-American Senator Marco Rubio are also championing the proposed legislation, which was tabled on June 19.

On Thursday, U.S Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and presidential advisor Ivanka Trump presented a report that cited Cuba's international medical missions as examples of "forced labour".

"Up to 50,000 Cuban doctors have been forced by the Castro regime

into human trafficking situations in more than 60 countries,” Pompeo said in his remarks. “They are the regime’s number one source of income.”

Describing the proposed bill as a breach of international law and a “great slander” on the nation of Cuba, Ambassador Comissiong charged that it would give the U.S government powers to which it is not entitled.

“It is seeking to give the U.S government the power to determine for sovereign countries and the other CARICOM states, their right to engage in relations with the nation of Cuba and truth be told, it is a very sad and pathetic development when three members of the U.S senate could seek to disparage this beautiful humanitarian programme through which Cuba has rendered critical medical services to suffering people all across the world,” Comissiong told **Barbados TODAY**.

Cuban doctors have been instrumental in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, providing to the people of Italy at a time when the European country was considered the epicenter of the deadly virus. Since then thousands of officials from the Cuban International Medical Brigade have been deployed across other parts of Europe, Africa and the Americas.

Cuban doctors and nurses have been lending support throughout CARICOM and the 101 officials in Barbados have been lauded for their contribution to the fight against COVID.

“It is unforgivable to suggest such things about these wonderful nurses that are here in Barbados serving the Barbadian people; the wonderful doctors and nurses that went to Sierra Leone at the height of the Ebola outbreak when medical personnel across the world were afraid to have anything to do with Ebola,” Comissiong declared.

“How unforgivable that persons who should know better and who do know better, but for narrow partisan political reasons would seek to slander and discredit these medical professionals by suggesting that they are victims of human trafficking,” he said of the three U.S senators.

In response, the CARICOM ambassador suggested that regional governments collectively denounce the bill and engage the region’s

ambassadors in Washington to lobby against it.

“These diplomats ought to exert themselves, to share information with members of the U.S senate and House of Representatives about the true nature of the Cuban medical programme and the benefits it brings to suffering human beings across this world.

“It would also be helpful if they could educate members of the U.S congress to the fact that sovereign independent nations like ours in the Caribbean have the right to enter into relations with other independent nations like Cuba and not be subjected to sanctions from the U.S government for simply exercising our rights as members of the international community,” Comissiong suggested.

Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne has already denounced the proposed bill and is urging CARICOM countries to do the same. Jamaica’s opposition People’s National Party (PNP) on Friday expressed “grave” concern about Andrew Holness’ silence on matter.

Efforts to reach Prime Minister Mia Mottley’s press secretary Roy Morris for a comment on the developments were unsuccessful.

Meanwhile, Comissiong alluded to a growing movement calling for the Nobel Peace Prize to be awarded to the Cuban International Medical Brigades as a testament to the legitimacy of their humanitarian work

“This call is being raised in Italy, Spain and many parts of the Caribbean. So, in light of that type of international gratitude and international appreciation of their efforts, to hear that three rabid anti-Cuba senators have introduced this type of bill is really tragic and regrettable,” he said.

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