Cuba in Coronavirus Times

By: Giusette León García / CubaSí
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I have a friend in Facebook (we're only friends there), whom I almost never agree with, but we've just agreed in something these days: Living in Cuba brings peace in pandemic times.

We are not immune, but are trained as anyone to face up epidemics, catastrophes, disasters, either natural or provoked. I was not born when one of the first tests was sent to the country: the dengue hemorrhagic fever.

And it was not sent neither by God nor by the Devil. It was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States. In 1981, the country reported over 344,203 sick people, with 10,312 serious and very serious cases, and 158 fatalities, among them 101 children under 15, according to an article from Revista Cubana de Medicina Tropical.

Nobody knew where the disease came from or how to treat it, but the state's will, our doctors' training and dedication, and the organization and discipline of a

society and a health system without Facebook or Twitter, allowed us to overcome the crisis. Today, no one knows more about dengue than any Cuban.

Cuba's effective response to cyclones, hurricanes and catastrophes has been acknowledged more than once by different international bodies linked to the United Nations. The levels of information, human life protection and recovery capacity of the island have been praised as regional reference.

In 2018, the World Food Programme (WFP) representative in the largest Antillean Island stated: "Cuba has created a nationwide organic, integrated and articulated system around its Civil Defense, which includes all institutions, at all levels, in the provincial and local governments, linked to disaster risk management." Thus informed Prensa Latina Agency.

The children hospitalized with dengue hemorrhagic fever in 1981 received a special visit at any time: Fidel. Legend tells that cyclones avoided and respected him, many things are said about the Commander-in-Chief who, dressed in his green olive uniform, used to tour the country in his jeep before, during and after the winds.

Cuba was in Haiti because our doctors went there to deal with the cholera epidemic which claimed around 10,000 lives in that tiny Caribbean land in 2010. Four years later, hundreds of Cuban physicians defeated Ebola in Africa. Members of the Henry Reeve, a volunteer brigade that by that time had completed missions in around 18 countries during emergency situations.

But due to the ups and downs of life, the Henry Reeve brigade was not created neither by God nor by the Devil, because like the 1981 dengue hemorrhagic fever in Cuba, it was a human creation, a sample of those ends in which we live, those paradoxes: Fidel Castro founded it to assist the people of New Orleans, United States, after the devastating passage of Hurricane Katrina, from which the poorest are still recovering.

COVID-19 has already left over 140,000 confirmed cases in more than 100 countries around the world, so it was a matter of time for it to enter Cuba. When it arrived, the Cuban president was already touring the country, providing guidelines, supporting contingency plans and participating in every detail of the prevention plan. Every Ministry has already foreseen both decisions and measures, without hysteria or racism, based on science, on solidarity and on the organization of a country of warriors who have survived so many battles.

No school has been closed in Cuba and information channels have been opened, unbroken lines to consult experts. Panic hasn't been sown, but education, the knowledge about what we are facing up and how to do it. A Cuban song reads

that every Cuban neighborhood and street breathe Revolution, certainly, congratulations, because should someone coughs another listens to him/her and takes him/her to the Family Doctor’s Office, the local polyclinic or the nearest hospital, everything is properly handled here.

They are not contingency structures, but systems that adapt to the contingency and tackle the blockade, the biological warfare, earthquakes and hurricane winds, and that are already tackling Covid-19 too, by the way, it remains to be known whether it was sent by God or by the Devil.

Translated by Jorge Mesa Benjamín / CubaSi Translation Staff