

In the Midst of an Unprecedented Global Pandemic, Politicizing Cuba's COVID-19 Response is Counterproductive

By: WOLA
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In a statement released April 10, three members of Congress from Florida [criticized](#) the Cuban government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement urges the international community to reject Cuban medical brigades, citing long-standing concerns about the labor conditions of Cuban doctors. The medical missions are currently working in at least 17 countries to provide support in battling COVID-19.

The statement from the congressional representatives follows a [March 24 tweet](#) by the U.S. State Department, which also warned countries against accepting Cuban medical missions to help respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The statement by the three Members of Congress, which warns against the Cuban government spreading "disinformation" about the virus, comes as a Miami Dade county official implied, without evidence, that Cuba is ["weaponizing"](#) the virus in southern Florida.

In response, research and advocacy group the Washington Office on

Latin America (WOLA) offered the following quotes:

“In the midst of a global pandemic, the Trump administration and some Florida politicians are choosing to refight the Cold War rather than helping make sure people get access to life-saving care,” said [Marguerite Jiménez](#), who directs WOLA’s Cuba program. **“Countries are asking for desperately needed help and Cuba, even with its own domestic COVID-19 challenges, is offering assistance. Now is a time for greater engagement and cooperation, not less. The countries of the world and this moment in history demand it.”**

“This kind of aggressive rhetoric does nothing to address any existing labor rights concerns with Cuba’s medical brigades. Rather, it uses a serious, life-threatening global pandemic as a pretext to politicize much-needed international medical cooperation,” said [Geoff Thale](#), WOLA’s President. **“If members of Congress and the Trump administration were serious about addressing labor concerns in Cuba’s medical brigades program, they would have engaged with Cuba years ago. Raising these issues now gives the appearance that the real concerns are less about improving the labor conditions of Cuban health care professionals, or about saving lives in the countries facing the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, and more about denouncing the Cuban government.”**

See also WOLA’s [recent joint statement](#) with seven other organizations, including the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA), the Latin America Working Group, the Cuba Study Group, and Engage Cuba, calling for a time-bound suspension of sanctions on Cuba to facilitate the flow of humanitarian and medical supplies amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
