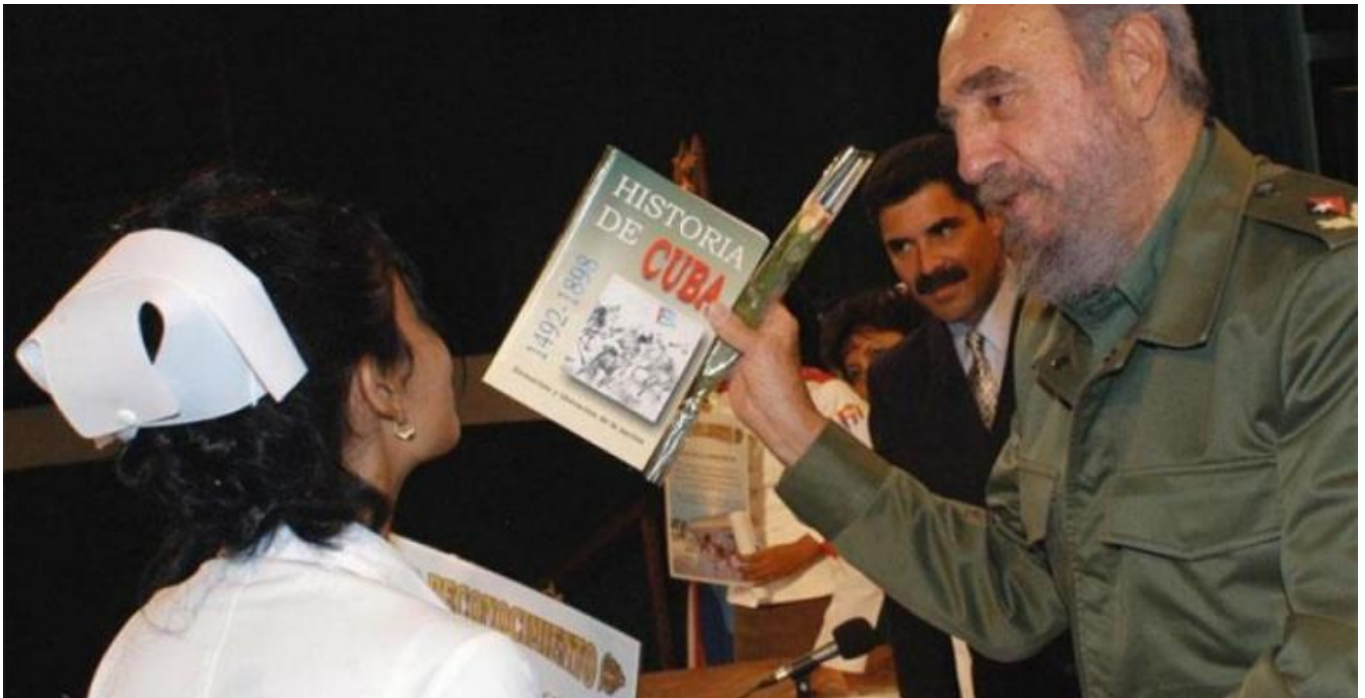


Fidel: Main architect of Cuba's Medical Assistance to the World

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Cuba's contribution to the world in the field of health care has been impressive. For years to come, this small island with big heart will be remembered in every corner of planet Earth. Thousands of people recovered their vision thanks to Cuba's assistance. Many overcame death when Cuban collaborators faced Ebola virus. And they smiled again after the resolution of tragedies caused by earthquakes and other climatic phenomena.

Great deeds have been made by Cuba in this regard, especially doctors and health professionals—from specialists to nurses, physiatrists, electromedical technicians and others. They have reached the most remote places with great heroism to provide unprecedented health care.

History will always appreciate that May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1963 when the *Britannia* airplane—*Cubana de Aviacion* airline—traveled to Algeria with 29 doctors, 4 stomatologists, 14 nurses, and 7 healthcare technicians. This is regarded as the first Cuban international mission in this field, although medical aid had been sent to Chile after an earthquake in 1960.

Back then, Algeria had been freed from French oppression and its Prime Minister,

Ahmed Ben Bella, few days after his election, held in Havana a fraternal meeting with the Commander in Chief Fidel Castro, who was briefed about the massive departures of French doctors after the independence. By virtue of this, only 600 doctors —285 of them Algerian-born physicians— remained in that nation to see nearly 11 million citizens.

By the end of 1962, at the opening ceremony of the Victoria de Girón Institute of Basic and Preclinical Sciences, Fidel announced the decision of the Revolutionary Government to provide medical assistance in the Health field. That is why the first medical brigade departed for this North African nation in 1963.

It was the beginning of an international feat that reaches the present days with the presence of Cuban health professionals in 67 countries around the world.

Fidel was the promoter of such humanist principle. His thinking and revolutionary ethic led to take the virtues of Medicine to the furthest corner of nations as well as impoverished and unprotected populations.

However, the greatest expression of solidarity regarding Cuba's medical assistance took place by the end of 1998, when Hurricane Mitch hit several Central American countries, particularly Honduras and Guatemala.

Cuba reacted immediately and sent medical and paramedical staff to help unselfishly for as long as it had taken, besides contributing with medicines and technical equipment.

September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005, thanks to Fidel's initiative and in light of the damages caused by Hurricane Katrina in the U.S., the Medical Brigade Henry Reeve was created. This brigade specialized in emergency situations but its personnel could not go there as the U.S. government rejected the assistance. One month later, a leading brigade arrived in Islamabad. Afterwards, more than 30 field hospitals were deployed in the northern area of the country where weather conditions were really bad.

There are countless examples of places where Cuba has provided medical assistance. Besides such assistance work, Cuba contributes with the training of personnel, human resources and even the opening of medicine schools in places such as Venezuela, South Yemen, Guyana, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Uganda, Angola, Haiti, just to name a few.

These institutions are similar to the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), opened on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1999, where the Historical Leader of the Revolution stated: "More than physicians, they shall be zealous guardians of what human beings appreciate above all else. They will be apostles and builders of a more humane world."

The ideas of our Commander in Chief regarding Medicine and service vocation have today paramount importance as thousands of professionals have been outraged by Brazil's newly-elected president Jair Bolsonaro.

The essence of Fidel's thinking and his most precious legacy for the eternity lie in every men and women who make up this White Coats Army, as he himself named it.

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