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MEDICC Condemns Kidnapping of Cuban Doctors in Kenya

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MEDICC energetically condemns the abduction of two Cuban physicians volunteering in Kenya. Drs. Assel Herrera, family physician, and Dr. Landy Rodríguez, surgeon, were serving in Mandera County, Northern Kenya near the Somali border. According to reports, the two were kidnapped as they headed for work, after their vehicle was ambushed and gunmen opened fire, killing one of their Kenyan police escorts. Cuban Doctors in Kenya Kidnapped

The two are members of the team of 101 Cuban doctors now staffing Kenya's public health facilities in all 47 counties.

This is the first time in over five decades of Cuban health cooperation that physicians serving abroad have been abducted, and a police spokesman said local authorities suspect the kidnappers may be tied to the el-Shabaab extremist group, based in Somalia and linked to el Qaeda.

Terrorism in all its forms must end, but it is all the more horrifying when directed at health and aid workers, who have already put their lives on the line to bring medical care to those living in often poor and dangerous conditions.

Cuban health cooperation with Africa began in 1963 with the sending of over 50 physicians to newly independent Algeria, despite Cuba's own physician shortage at the time. Today, Cuba has some 90,000 doctors, well over half women, who serve at home in the country's universal health system, as well as abroad. Since 1963, 407,000 Cuban health professionals have

volunteered in 164 countries; of these, 183,000 are physicians.

“We have seen how these physicians work, far from home in remote and difficult regions, to bring health services to people,” notes Dr. C. William Keck, MEDICC Executive Director. “They view health care as the right of all people, not just those who can pay for it. They staff public health systems worldwide and deserve our admiration and respect.”

“MEDICC calls upon the international community, specifically the World Health Organization and the United Nations, to assist authorities in Cuba, Kenya and Somalia to immediately bring the two kidnapped physicians home to their families,” he said.

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