

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

May 6, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our concern that the Cuban government is taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to accelerate its exploitation of Cuban doctors by coercing them to participate in medical missions abroad. We firmly believe that the abuses perpetrated against Cuba's doctors constitute human trafficking and urge the Department of State to continue warning governments about tacit involvement in the Cuban regime's forced labor schemes.

In recent years, the Cuban regime's exploitative practices towards Cuba's doctors and medical personnel has been documented at length in investigations by leading media outlets, the U.S. Government, and prominent United Nations officials.¹ The State Department's 2019 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report included observations that:

“Cuban authorities coerced some participants to remain in the program, including by withholding their passports, restricting their movement, using “minders” to conduct surveillance of participants outside of work, threatening to revoke their medical licenses, retaliate against their family members in Cuba if participants leave the program, or impose criminal penalties, exile, and family separation if participants do not return to Cuba as directed by government supervisors.”²

The 2019 TIP Report also stated that, “[t]he Cuban government acknowledges that it withholds passports of overseas medical personnel in Venezuela”.³ Additionally, in November 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery and the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons wrote to Cuban authorities to express their concerns about the conditions faced by Cuban doctors and medical personnel participating in the regime's foreign medical missions. Specifically, the UN Special Rapporteurs noted that these conditions

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/world/americas/venezuela-cuban-doctors.html>

² <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf>, at p. 164.

³ *Id.*

“could amount to forced labor, according to the forced labor indicators established by the International Labor Organizations (ILO). Forced labor constitutes a modern form of slavery.”⁴

Despite the growing body of evidence on the Cuban regime’s trafficking of doctors and medical personnel, we are alarmed that governments such as in Italy, Qatar, South Africa, Argentina, and several Caribbean nations have accepted Cuba’s medical missions in recent months. We respectfully request that you direct the U.S. Embassies in each of these countries to deliver a demarche to host government officials to inform them about the Cuban regime’s forced labor practices.

Additionally, as governments around the world are forced to take extraordinary measures to address the pandemic and many communities still face challenges in the United States, we urge the Trump Administration to continue the United States’ longstanding humanitarian tradition of providing available assistance to those countries most affected by COVID-19.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator

⁴https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24868&fbclid=IwAR23Xe7kPhHkalgwbuHnmLpujB8NJmx_R-iV6d3vjZSDjsLTZqZqXOVmvXA, at p. 3.