

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

March 17, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20522

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to request you renew and strengthen your diplomatic efforts to raise awareness of Cuba's attempts to promote human trafficking throughout the Western Hemisphere. Specifically, we ask that you urge governments in the region to end their use of Cuban medical personnel in their national healthcare programs.

The U.S. Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) and annual Human Rights Report finds that Cuba's international medical missions are a form of human trafficking and modern-day slavery. According to the Department's 2022 reporting, Cuba's Unidad Central de Cooperación Médica, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment manage a system whereby Cuban doctors and medical personnel are forced to work overseas under opaque contracts. Not only does the Cuban regime confiscate the passports, professional credentials, and salaries of the victims of these programs, they also threaten these professionals and their families should they attempt to leave.

Despite the substantial body of evidence documenting the harms of Cuba's international medical missions program, in recent weeks, the governments of Mexico, Brazil and Colombia have announced their intention to expand or restart their participation in these coercive programs. Last December, Mexican media reported another contingent of Cuban medical personnel arriving in the country, per an agreement signed last year between Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the Cuban regime to increase the total number of Cuban medical professionals in the country to 500. In January, Brazil's Ministry of Health announced that it would restart the *Mais Médicos* program, which in the five years before its termination in 2019, employed nearly 20,000 Cuban doctors. Colombian President Gustavo Petro has also announced an ambitious healthcare reform program that may include the arrival of Cuban doctors into the country.

Involvement in these missions is a clear violation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and these nations' own laws prohibiting forced labor. It is also inconsistent with our nation's commitment to fundamental freedoms and universal human rights. For example, the Cuban medical missions are a direct violation of Article 23 of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement which calls for "the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor." Moreover, the Mexican constitution explicitly prohibits exploitation of persons through

“slavery,” “labor exploitation,” and “forced labor or services.” The continued importation of unpaid medical personnel from Cuba flagrantly ignores these standards.

Given the State Department’s record of exposing Cuba’s medical missions in its annual TIP report, we ask that you significantly expand U.S. diplomatic efforts to end the cruel exploitation of the approximately 50,000 Cuban medical professionals who are not compensated for their work, and instead are used as instruments of oppression by the Cuban regime. This should include sharing with governments in the region the same evidence that informs the Department’s findings with regard to Cuban medical missions in its annual TIP report and, if needed, exercising relevant authorities, which could include under the Global Magnitsky sanctions program, to impose sanctions on foreign government officials responsible for supporting the continuation of serious human rights abuses against Cuban medical professionals.

We thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Robert Menendez
U.S. Senator