

[We send doctors, not soldiers](#)

In my Reflection of January 14, two days after the catastrophe in Haiti, which destroyed that neighboring sister nation, I wrote: "In the area of healthcare and others the Haitian people has received the cooperation of Cuba, even though this is a small and blockaded country. Approximately 400 doctors and healthcare workers are helping the Haitian people free of charge. Our doctors are working every day at 227 of the 237 communes of that country. On the other hand, no less than 400 young Haitians have been graduated as medical doctors in our country. They will now work alongside the reinforcement that traveled there yesterday to save lives in that critical situation. Thus, up to one thousand doctors and healthcare personnel can be mobilized without any special effort; and most are already there willing to cooperate with any other State that wishes to save Haitian lives and rehabilitate the injured."

"The head of our medical brigade has informed that 'the situation is difficult but we are already saving lives.'"

Hour after hour, day and night, the Cuban health professionals have started to work nonstop in the few facilities that were able to stand, in tents, and out in the parks or open-air spaces, since the population feared new aftershocks.

The situation was far more serious than was originally thought. Tens of thousands of injured were clamoring for help in the streets of Port-au-Prince; innumerable persons laid, dead or alive, under the rubble of clay or adobe used in the construction of the houses where the overwhelming majority of the population lived. Buildings, even the most solid, collapsed. Besides, it was necessary to look for the Haitian doctors who had graduated at the Latin American Medicine School throughout all the destroyed neighborhoods. Many of them were affected, either directly or indirectly, by the tragedy.

Some UN officials were trapped in their dormitories and tens of lives were lost, including the lives of several chiefs of MINUSTAH, a UN contingent. The fate of hundreds of other members of its staff was unknown.

Haiti's Presidential Palace crumbled. Many public facilities, including several hospitals, were left in ruins.

The catastrophe shocked the whole world, which was able to see what was going on through the images aired by the main international TV networks. Governments from everywhere in the planet announced they would be sending rescue experts, food, medicines, equipment and other resources.

In conformity with the position publicly announced by Cuba, medical staff from different countries –namely Spain, Mexico, and Colombia, among others– worked very hard alongside our doctors at the facilities they had improvised. Organizations such as PAHO and other friendly countries like Venezuela and other nations supplied medicines and other resources. The impeccable behavior of Cuban professionals and their leaders was absolutely void of chauvinism and remained out of the limelight.

Cuba, just as it had done under similar circumstances, when Hurricane Katrina caused huge devastation in the city of New Orleans and the lives of thousands of American citizens were in danger, offered to send a full medical brigade to cooperate with the people of the United States, a country that, as is well known, has vast resources. But at that moment what was needed were trained and well- equipped doctors to save lives. Given New Orleans geographical location, more than one thousand doctors of the "Henry Reeve" contingent mobilized and readied to leave for that city at any time of the day or the night, carrying with them the necessary medicines and equipment. It never crossed our mind that the

President of that nation would reject the offer and let a number of Americans that could have been saved to die. The mistake made by that government was perhaps the inability to understand that the people of Cuba do not see in the American people an enemy; it does not blame it for the aggressions our homeland has suffered.

Nor was that government capable of understanding that our country does not need to beg for favors or forgiveness of those who, for half a century now, have been trying, to no avail, to bring us to our knees.

Our country, also in the case of Haiti, immediately responded to the US authorities requests to fly over the eastern part of Cuba as well as other facilities they needed to deliver assistance, as quickly as possible, to the American and Haitian citizens who had been affected by the earthquake.

Such have been the principles characterizing the ethical behavior of our people. Together with its equanimity and firmness, these have been the ever-present features of our foreign policy. And this is known only too well by whoever have been our adversaries in the international arena.

Cuba will firmly stand by the opinion that the tragedy that has taken place in Haiti, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, is a challenge to the richest and more powerful countries of the world.

Haiti is a net product of the colonial, capitalist and imperialist system imposed on the world. Haiti's slavery and subsequent poverty were imposed from abroad. That terrible earthquake occurred after the Copenhagen Summit, where the most elemental rights of 192 UN member States were trampled upon.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, a competition has unleashed in Haiti to hastily and illegally adopt boys and girls. UNICEF has been forced to adopt preventive measures against the uprooting of many children, which will deprive their close relatives from their rights.

There are more than one hundred thousand deadly victims. A high number of citizens have lost their arms or legs, or have suffered fractures requiring rehabilitation that would enable them to work or manage their own.

Eighty per cent of the country needs to be rebuilt. Haiti requires an economy that is developed enough to meet its needs according to its productive capacity. The reconstruction of Europe or Japan, which was based on the productive capacity and the technical level of the population, was a relatively simple task as compared to the effort that needs to be made in Haiti. There, as well as in most of Africa and elsewhere in the Third World, it is indispensable to create the conditions for a sustainable development. In only forty years time, humanity will be made of more than nine billion inhabitants, and right now is faced with the challenge of a climate change that scientists accept as an inescapable reality.

In the midst of the Haitian tragedy, without anybody knowing how and why, thousands of US marines, 82nd Airborne Division troops and other military forces have occupied Haiti. Worse still is the fact that neither the United Nations Organization nor the US government have offered an explanation to the world's public opinion about this relocation of troops.

Several governments have complained that their aircraft have not been allowed to land in order to deliver the human and technical resources that have been sent to Haiti.

Some countries, for their part, have announced they would be sending an additional number of troops and military equipment. In my view, such events will complicate and create chaos in international cooperation, which is already in itself complex. It is necessary to seriously discuss this issue. The UN should be entrusted with the leading role it deserves in these so delicate matters.

Our country is accomplishing a strictly humanitarian mission. To the extent of its possibilities, it will contribute the human and material resources at its disposal. The will of our people, who takes pride in its medical doctors and cooperation workers who provide vital services, is huge, and will rise to the

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Publicado en Fidel soldado de las ideas (<http://www.comandanteenjefe.net>)

occasion.

Any significant cooperation that is offered to our country will not be rejected, but its acceptance will fully depend on the importance and transcendence of the assistance that is requested from the human resources of our homeland.

It is only fair to state that, up until this moment, our modest aircrafts and the important human resources that Cuba has made available to the Haitian people have arrived at their destination without any difficulty whatsoever.

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Fidel Castro Ruz
January 23, 2010
5:30 p.m.

Fecha:

23/01/2010

URL de origen: <http://www.comandanteenjefe.net/es/node/28639?height=600&width=600>