



HAITI EARTHQUAKE

Cuba Solidarity Campaign briefing

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www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN ACTION – CUBA RESPONDS IN HAITI

"One of the most important medical forces on the ground giving medical care to the Haitian people in the first 72 hours after the earthquake." Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) report on the Cuban response.

When the earthquake struck, 344 Cuban health professionals were already stationed in Haiti and able to respond immediately to the humanitarian disaster. Within hours they had set up field hospitals in the rubble – treating more than 2,000 people a day and a total of more than 25,000 survivors by 26 January.

Cuba, a poor blockaded country itself, donated 10 tons of medical supplies, 400,000 tetanus jab vaccines and sent a further 60 health specialists with experience in similar international catastrophes who arrived with drugs, medical supplies, food, serum and plasma. They are working to save lives alongside 400 Haitian doctors – all graduates of Cuba's Latin America Medical School.

Cuba has been supporting public health initiatives in Haiti since 1998. Since then, 6,094 Cuban doctors have volunteered in the country, carrying out 14 million consultations and saving 230,000 lives. Today, 570 Haitian students study in Cuba on free medical scholarships.

"...it was an enormous advantage that they [Cubans] were already here before the quake. They know the situation, the Health Ministry, the Haitian people...theirs is an enormous contribution." Dr Mirta Roses, PAHO Director



CUBA IN HAITI - over a decade of working together

- ▶ 6,094 Cuban health personnel have volunteered in Haiti as part of the Comprehensive health programme since 1998
- ▶ 225,000 surgeries carried out
- ▶ 100,000 birth deliveries attended by Cuban health professionals, 230,000 lives saved
- ▶ 47,273 eye operations performed as part of Operation miracle
- ▶ 917 professionals from Haiti trained in Cuba, 570 out of them physicians.
- ▶ 160,030 Haitians taught to read through Cuban educational support
- ▶ Today, 660 young Haitians study for free in Cuba, 541 on medical scholarships

EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE

- ▶ 512 Cubans working in Haiti today, 410 of them are health professionals and the rest belong to education and other social sectors and services.
- ▶ 403 Cubans were in the country on Tuesday 12 January, when the earthquake struck: 344 working in the health sector, 200 of whom were stationed in and around Port-au-Prince.

**SUPPORT CUBAN MEDICAL TEAMS IN HAITI – SEE BACK COVER FOR
DETAILS ON HOW TO DONATE DIRECTLY TO CUBAN MEDICAL BRIGADES**

CUBA AND HAITI - ISLANDS WORLDS APART

Just 80km of Caribbean Sea separate them but even before the earthquake the contrasts for people born on the islands of Cuba and Haiti could not be starker.

As Seamus Milne wrote in the Guardian in January: "While Haiti's infant mortality rate is around 80 per 1,000, Cuba's is 5.8; while nearly half Haitian adults are illiterate; the figure in Cuba is around 3%. And while 800 Haitians died in the hurricanes that devastated both islands last year, Cuba lost four people."

For many in Latin America Cuba is a beacon to what human beings can achieve when they have opportunities for healthcare and education and a say in their future. Haiti, Cuba's sister island in the Antilles is a harrowing picture of the human suffering caused by years of foreign intervention and economic policies moulded to benefit elites, multinationals and foreign economic interests imposed on a people from the outside.

Why? Because where a ruthless blockade and aggressive US policies have failed in Cuba for 50 years, they have successfully maintained a stranglehold on economic interests in Haiti.

That so many people died in Port au Prince on 12 January can not solely be attributed to the aching poverty which exists there. Blame also lies squarely at the feet of the international community and especially the US for their actions in the country in recent years. While many press reports focus on the humanitarian disaster and suffering caused by the quake, they do a disservice to the Haitian people by not exposing the policies that caused the poverty and exacerbated their suffering in the first place.



A Cuban flag flies alongside the Haitian flag outside a field hospital



Port-au-Prince following the earthquake

Just 30 years ago, the country was self-sufficient in rice. But the IMF bullied the government into accepting loan conditions which slashed import duties on the crop. Local agriculture and livelihoods were decimated as the island became a dumping ground for heavily subsidised US rice. Haiti's Arbonite Valley, once home to thriving communities of farmers, now has one of the highest child malnutrition rates in the country. Impoverished families have had little choice but to leave their homes and land and move en masse to the overcrowded capital. Here they live cheek by jowl in makeshift dwellings, trying to eke a living in a country where fifty per cent of the population earn less than US\$2 a day.

Haiti has never been forgiven for the slave rebellion that won it independence from French rule in 1804. Debt, US backed dictators, coups and military intervention have been a constant in the last 200 years. The country's first democratically elected President; Jean-Bertrand Aristide was twice removed by US backed coups and troops, the most recent just six years ago in 2004.

Today the role of US troops on the island is again under scrutiny. Aid agencies have complained that in the first few vital days following the quake precious hours were wasted when the airport was closed to them. US forces gave priority to landing more troops, evacuating US citizens, and allowing Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to visit. There is no doubt more people died as a result.

There are now 13,000 US troops in Haiti, US ships blockade the island to prevent refugees seeking

sanctuary in the US. It is not paranoia to view this militarisation in the region cynically. Just last year Colombia handed over seven military bases to the US and President Zelaya of Honduras was removed in a US supported coup. It will come as no surprise to hear that oil reserves have been found in Haitian waters.

Haiti undoubtedly needs immediate aid and long term support to rebuild itself. But it is the Haitian people who should control this. Their aid should be without soldiers or strings attached. What good is the \$100 million loan that the IMF has offered to a country already crippled by debt repayments and is likely to come on condition of public service cuts, wage freezes and privatisation?

String free aid has been Cuba's priority since it began supporting public health initiatives in Haiti in 1998. Over the last 12 years, 6,094 Cuban doctors have volunteered in the country, treating 14 million people and saving 230,000 lives. Four hundred Cuban doctors working in Haiti lived through the terror of the quake and emerged from the ruins within hours to begin treating their Haitian brothers and sisters. They set up field hospitals in the rubble – treating more than 2,000 people a day and a total of more than 25,000 survivors by 26 January.

Cuba, a poor blockaded country itself, donated 10 tons of medical supplies. Its doctors are now administering 400,000 tetanus jab vaccines donated by the Cuban government. A further 60 specialists with experience in similar international catastrophes arrived within 24 hours carrying drugs, medical supplies, food, serum and plasma. Today they are working to save lives alongside 400 Haitian doctors – all graduates of Cuba's Latin America Medical School (ELAM). [See overleaf for details on how to donate directly to Cuban medical teams in Haiti.]

This support will continue long after the TV crews have moved on. Cuba's focus is on helping Haitians to rebuild their country and provide essential services for their people. In Cuba today, 640 Haitian students are on scholarships, 570 training to be doctors at ELAM.

With the exception of excellent early video reports on CNN, this support has been at best ignored and at worst distorted by the world's media. Fox News carried an early story chastising Cuba for doing nothing to help. Here in the UK, the Evening Standard ran a scurrilous story suggesting that Cuban medical brigades were needlessly amputating survivor's limbs!

Those with the facts, like for example, Dr Mirta Roses, Pan American Health Organisation

Director, tell a different story: "...it was an enormous advantage that they were already here before the quake. They know the situation, the Health Ministry, the Haitian people...theirs is an enormous contribution."

Just as Cuba is supporting Haiti, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign is supporting UK efforts for the country by organising the Concert for Haiti to raise funds for the TUC Aid Earthquake Appeal at Congress House on Wednesday 3 February.

The concert is not just to raise money, which is undoubtedly much needed. It aims to raise awareness and stand in solidarity with the Haitian people who will also be represented at the event.

Aid is needed in the short term, but we must also campaign for an end to the US military occupation, for the country's debt to be dropped and for respect for Haiti's sovereignty so that the Haitian people are free to coordinate and lead the relief efforts to rebuild their country.

After the concert reports on the event and news reports from Haiti will continue to be updated at www.concertforhaiti.co.uk

Concert for Haiti, Wednesday 3 February, 7pm TUC Congress House. Featuring Billy Bragg, Cuban band Son Mas, Benjamin Zephaniah, Omar Puente and award winning British actors Alan Rickman and Tom Wilkinson plus special guests.



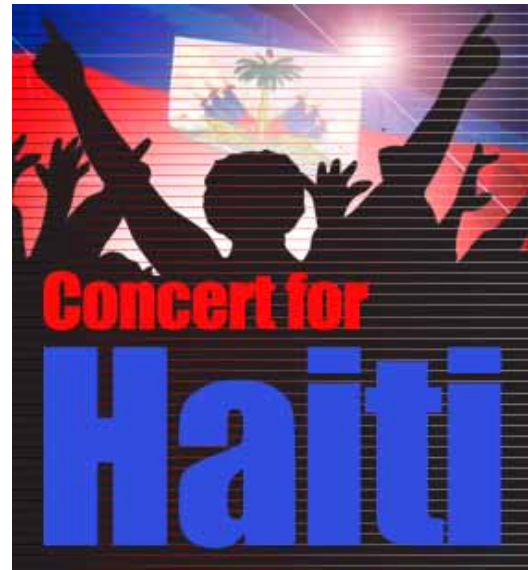
Cuban medics are treating 2,000 patients a day

SUPPORT CUBAN MEDICAL BRIGADES IN HAITI

Direct donations to Cuba's Haiti Medical Brigades can be made via the Cuba Solidarity Campaign at www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk or on 020 8800 0155.

Alternatively you can send a cheque made payable to CSC, marked Haiti Earthquake to CSC, c/o Unite Woodberry, 218 Green lanes, London, N4 2HB

All moneys received will go directly to support Cuban medical brigades working in Haiti.



www.concertforhaiti.co.uk

After the concert the website will continue to post news stories on Haiti and video reports on the concert. Sales of concert t-shirts and donations to the appeal will still be possible through the site.



Join today and receive a free Cuban music CD, plus our quarterly magazine CubaSí. If you would like to join or find out more about the campaign please complete the form below and return to CSC at the address opposite

Name.....

Address.....

.....

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Membership rates £20 waged/ £8 unwaged



About the Cuba Solidarity Campaign

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign (CSC) campaigns in the UK against the illegal US blockade of Cuba and for the Cuban people's right to determine their own future free from foreign interference and aggression. To find out more contact:

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