

*Caribbean leaders oppose U.S.
policy targeting Cuban medical
missions*



Cuban doctors arrive at the Jose Marti International Airport in Havana, Cuba, June 8, 2020, after traveling to Italy to help with the COVID-19 emergency response. (Ismael Francisco/Pool via AP, File)

Georgetown, March 13 (RHC)-- Caribbean leaders are pushing back against a new U.S. policy that aims to crack down on Cuban medical missions, saying that the work of hundreds of Cuban medical staff across the region is essential.

Hugh Todd, Guyana's foreign minister, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that foreign ministers from a 15-member Caribbean trade bloc known as CARICOM recently met with U.S. Special Envoy for Latin

America Mauricio Claver-Carone in Washington, D.C. after the U.S. threatened to restrict the visas of those involved with Cuban missions, which U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has called “forced labor.”

“The U.S. is a strategic partner to Caricom, but this very important issue has to be dealt with at the level of heads of government,” Todd said.

Overall, Cuba has some 24,180 doctors working in 56 nations, with the missions boosting health care across the Caribbean, especially in impoverished nations with limited medical services.

“Their presence here is of importance to our health care system,” Kamina Johnson Smith, Jamaica’s foreign minister, said at a press briefing last week, noting the island has more than 400 Cuban doctors, nurses, biomedical engineers and technicians.

At least two influential Caribbean leaders, the prime ministers of Trinidad and Tobago and of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, have publicly rallied against the new policy and said they would gladly forgo their U.S. visas.

“I will prefer to lose my visa than to have 60 poor and working people die,” said St. Vincent Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves. He said Cuban doctors are providing critical care to patients including 60 who receive dialysis treatment. “I will not be able to offer that service,” he told reporters during a recent official trip to Jamaica.

Meanwhile, Trinidad Prime Minister Keith Rowley told reporters Monday that he wouldn’t mind losing his U.S. visa either.

[SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS]

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