

Medicuba asks Washington to show evidence it has sold drugs to the island



Washington, April 11 (AP)-- Cuban health officials on Friday denied a statement made by Washington diplomats, who said the United States sold medicines to the island last year, and once again rejected sanctions in the context of the new coronavirus pandemic.

“The blockade has a great impact on the daily life of the population,” said Dr. Lázaro Silva, vice president of Medicuba, the state-owned company that imports health supplies, during an interview with The Associated Press.

“There is a group of resources that we acquire and that buying in the United States would favor us because it is a much closer market.”

Silva indicated that in previous years contact was made with some 60 medical supplies firms, but only two replied, including Bayer, which was the only one that reached an agreement in 2019. However, it could not be executed either, as the company alleged that his Treasury Department permit had expired.

As exceptions to its embargo laws passed 60 years ago, the United States allows relaxation for medicines and food. In the past decade, there has been an exchange –especially in food– but it has been paralyzed as President Donald Trump tightened conditions and froze the approach policy of his predecessor, Barack Obama.

This week, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Michael Kozak, wrote on his Twitter account that “in 2019, the US exported millions of dollars of US medical products to Cuba” and that to say otherwise was a campaign to disinformation from the island government. The Charge d’Affairs of the United States in Cuba, Mara Tekach repeated it in a video broadcast on social networks.

Silva denied what was said by US officials. “I invite you to show the evidence that Medicuba has been sold medicines and Medicuba is the only one that imports medicines,” he said.

Instead, it recognized that it is purchased through third countries or as resale some products for specific diseases.

For his part, Dr. Ernesto Marimón, director of International Relations of the Ministry of Health, assured that in the last year Cuba lost 160 million dollars due to US sanctions in the field of health, having to go shopping in remote places with expensive freight, for example.

Under the Trump administration, the embargo “has flared up and with the epidemic that flare-up is greater because we need (medicines) urgently, quickly and we have to resort to distant markets.”

Trump’s goal is to suffocate the island economy to push for political change.

“The block in itself is cruel. That cruelty is doubled and tripled when you do not alleviate those measures to allow solving drugs and equipment for people who are suffering from an epidemic,” said Marimón.

Countries like Argentina, personalities such as the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights,, Michele Bachelet and church groups, asked the United States to lift sanctions on nations like Cuba and Venezuela to facilitate the confrontation with COVID-19.

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