

# *The Nobel Peace Prize campaign for Cuban medical brigades*

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By Charles McKelvey

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An international campaign is underway in support of the nomination of the Cuban Henry Reeve medical brigade for the Nobel Peace Prize. The campaign was launched on April 28 by the French organizations Cuba Linda and France Cuba. More than forty social, political, labor, and solidarity organizations of Europe have joined the campaign. As of June 15, over 10,000 people around the world have signed the petitions that are available online.

First proposed by European organizations, the campaign has spread internationally. A campaign in the United States was announced by the actor Danny Glover on June 16. Medea Benjamin, co-director of the pacifist organization Code Pink, and Alicia Jrapko, of the International Committee for the Peace, Justice, and Dignity of the Peoples, also are participating in the U.S. campaign.

The Henry Reeve medical brigade is formally named the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialized for Situations of Disasters and Serious Epidemics. Henry Reeve was a young man from the United States who fought for Cuba during its first independence war of 1868 to 1878, sacrificing his life to the cause of Cuban independence.

The Henry Reeve Brigade was founded in 2005 by Fidel Castro. It was created to respond to the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans. Some 1,586 health professionals were prepared to depart for the U.S. city, but the government of the United States ignored the offer. Several days later, the Brigade was sent to Pakistan, following a devastating earthquake. Since that beginning, more than 7000 health professionals have participated in Henry Reeve brigades, which have come to the aid of victims of earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, and epidemics in Africa, Latin American, the Caribbean, and Asia. In 2015 and 2016, the Brigade sent 400 doctors, nurses, and other health workers to confront the Ebola pandemic in the West African countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia. In 2017, the Henry Reeve Brigade was granted the Dr. Lee Jong-wook Memorial Award for Public Health by the World Health Organization.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2000 Cuban doctors, nurses, and health professionals have been integrated in Henry Reeve brigades in 28 countries, including Europe, with brigades having been deployed in Italy and Andorra.

The Belgian campaign Website Cubanismo declares that Cuba “shows to the world in these times of coronavirus what is true solidarity, with the sending of health professionals to the entire world.” It further states that Cuba, with its solidarity, is showing that a world of cooperation for well-being is possible, and that there exists an alternative world to that of ferocious competition for the benefit of a few. While some countries export arms and wars, Cubans arrives with aid, which is a true contribution to peace on the planet.

The Nobel Peace Prize was established by the will of the Swedish industrialist and arms manufacturer Alfred Nobel, who had maintained many years of correspondence with the Austrian peace activist Bertha von Suttner. The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded annually to persons or organizations that have “done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

The Nobel Peace Prize recipient is selected by the Norwegian Nobel Committee, a five-member committee appointed by the Parliament of Norway. The Committee is aided in its selection by permanent advisors, including Norwegian academics with expertise in related subject areas. Advisors usually have some months to complete reports.

A nomination is considered valid if it is submitted by persons who meet certain criteria, including members of national assemblies and national governments of sovereign states; university professors, professors emeriti and associate professors of history, social sciences, law, philosophy, theology, and religion; university rectors and university directors; and directors of peace research institutes and foreign policy institutes. Nominations must be submitted no later than January 31. Normally, the award is granted for contributions to peace during the previous year.

The campaign for the Nobel Peace Prize for the Henry Reeve Brigade occurs at a time in which humanity is at a crossroads. During the last seventy-five years, the world system has been unable to free itself from its colonial foundations. As a result, many states in the world do not have effective control of their natural resources; many nations are underdeveloped; great numbers of people suffer from a lack of fundamental human needs; and the global powers to interfere in the affairs of states, with intentions of maintaining or establishing access to natural resources and markets.

The most enlightened leaders of the world have understood that a sustainable future for humanity requires the development of structures of global governance based on the principles of cooperation among nations and solidarity among peoples. Following the mass destruction of the Second World War, the leading nations of the world came together to form the United Nations, whose charter proclaims the principle of the equality and sovereignty of nations. As the colonized peoples gained voice in world affairs, they strove to strengthen this necessary tendency toward cooperation among nations and respect for the equality and sovereignty of nations. They have participated actively in the United Nations and its organizations, and as a result, the General Assembly of United Nations approved in 1974 a document on a New International Economic Order, which affirmed the right of nations to self-determination and to sovereignty over their natural resources. The governments of the Third World, organized in the Non-Aligned Movement, today declare that respect for these principles is the necessary structural foundation for world peace.

Since 1959, Cuba has been an active participant in efforts to move toward a world order based on cooperation among nations and solidarity among peoples. It has played a leadership role in the Non-Aligned Movement, which today has 120 member nations that unite in demanding an alternative, more just international economic order and a more democratic system of global governance. Moreover, as a practical gesture of solidarity, with the intention of contributing in a concrete way to the construction of such an alternative world order. Cuba has for decades sent medical and educational missions to other nations.

The Henry Reeve Brigade is an expression in practice of the possibility for solidarity among peoples. It symbolizes a sustainable future for humanity, built on a foundation of structures of mutual respect and mutual support among nations. It represents faith in the future of humanity.

The Mission Statement of the campaign for the Nobel Peace prize for Cuban doctors declares: “We hope Cuba’s example will inspire those of us in other countries to promote policies and actions that are more compassionate and generous in not only combating pandemics but building a more just, peaceful and verdant world.”

In a world characterized by the priority of the market over the sovereignty of states and over human needs, by interference in the affairs of states in order to access natural resources and markets, and by the evident incapacity of nations to cooperate to confront a global pandemic, recognition by the Nobel Committee of the Cuban proclamation in practice of the need for cooperation and solidarity among nations would be a tonic for the soul of a suffering, anxious, and confused humanity.

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