

Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM): Defending hope for 25 years

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Havana, November 15 (RHC) -- The Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) is celebrating its 25th anniversary Friday, November 15th. The more than 31 thousand doctors who have been trained in Cuba as part of that beautiful project dreamed by Fidel, have managed to become true standard bearers in defense of life.

There are those who say that at the end of 1998, hope had abandoned Central America and the Caribbean: two tremendous hurricanes, George and Mitch, left a large number of deaths and incalculable material damage in those towns, which had already been plagued by the pandemic of poverty.

In the midst of “generous offers” and “millions of dollars” of aid from the most powerful, which in a few weeks were forgotten, Cuba was determined to help rebuild hope there. Cuba did not make promises, Cuba got down to work to make dreams come true, and with a stroke of solidarity began to give shape to a wonderful life project that this November 15 celebrates its 25th anniversary.

Hope: that is precisely what the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) has become for the thousands of young people from the poorest places in the world who have been coming to its classrooms for a quarter of a century to contribute in their countries “to the noblest and most humane of all trades: saving lives and preserving health,” as Fidel asked them on the founding day of this emblematic center.

It was at a Science and Technology Forum, on November 21, 1998, when the Commander in Chief announced the creation of a medical school and offered the first 500 scholarships for sister Nicaragua. The then Granma Naval Academy was the chosen site, and even in the midst of the commendable construction work that was underway, on February 27, 1999, the first 327 young people from that country arrived: by June, enrollment had reached 1,929 students from 18 nations.

On November 15, 1999, in the context of the IX Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, in the presence of a large number of presidents and heads of delegations attending the event, the Commander in Chief officially inaugurated the ELAM, which he considered “a modest contribution of Cuba to the unity and integration of the peoples.”

But this great dream of Fidel's was not limited to a single and tangible geographic space in the Cuban capital city, but, three years after the first step, it began to spread to the universities of Medical Sciences throughout the national territory where, course after course, hundreds of professionals who are part of this wonderful solidarity project graduate.

Valuable and committed educators have made Fidel's dream of training doctors of science and conscience come true. After 20 graduations, the ELAM has graduated 31,180 professionals from 122 countries, who have become standard-bearers of that great dream conceived by Fidel to bring “doctors and not bombs” to the world.

And if those founding days were difficult for Cuba -when the country was going through the complex years of the special period-, no less difficult today is the context in which we are developing, marked by the imposition on our people of the unjust economic, commercial and financial blockade by the United States government, as well as the inclusion of the largest of the Antilles in the list of alleged State sponsors of terrorism.

In the midst of so many economic obstacles, the principles that gave birth to ELAM remain intact. The more than 200 educators who make up its faculty are determined to bring to the classrooms a quality training, which is not only distinguished by the high level of preparation of the students, but also by their principles of solidarity, ethics, commitment, sensitivity, professionalism... those that for more than six decades have distinguished the daily work of Cuban doctors.

To dream and believe in hope, the Commander in Chief summoned the poorest who, 25 years ago, came to our country to train as doctors and defend life from that noble trench. The history of ELAM, a University indissolubly linked to the history of Cuba, has shown the world that in our small island “maker of the impossible” we will never stop believing in hope.



Radio Habana Cuba