

Cuba digs deep to help Haiti

by *Bill F.*

Despite the western media silence on Cuba's assistance to Haiti following the earthquake, the truth is now coming out about the leading role Cuban medical aid is playing in that devastated country.

For starters, even before the earthquake, more than 300 Cuban healthcare professionals were already present in Haiti, providing medical care and training, especially obstetrical and ophthalmological services. They were quickly joined by the rapid response Henry Reeve Medical Brigade, experienced in dealing with such disasters in China, Indonesia and Pakistan.

Cuban doctors have restored three existing hospitals and set up five field hospitals and five diagnostic centres, with a total of 22 first aid posts and nine rehabilitation centres, with financial support from Venezuela.

In addition to Haitian medical staff, the Cuban team has been assisted by 100 specialists from Venezuela, Chile, Spain, Mexico, Colombia and Canada, including 17 nuns. Cuba has also supplied 400,000 tetanus vaccines for the injured.

Another batch of 200 Cuban-trained doctors from 24 countries in Africa and Latin American, and a dozen American doctors who graduated from Havana,



have been sent to Haiti to provide reinforcement for existing Cuban medical teams.

News and propaganda

"It is striking that there has been virtually no mention in the media of the fact that Cuba had several hundred health personnel on the ground before any other country," said David Sanders, a professor of public health from Western Cape University in South Africa.

Richard Gott, the *Guardian* newspaper's former foreign editor and a Latin America specialist, explains: "Western media are programmed to

be indifferent to aid that comes from unexpected places. In the Haitian case, the media have ignored not just the Cuban contribution, but also the efforts made by other Latin American countries."

Brazil is providing \$70 million in funding for 10 urgent care units, 50 mobile units for emergency care, a laboratory and a hospital, among other health services.

Venezuela has cancelled all Haiti debt, and has promised to supply oil free of charge until the country has recovered from the disaster.

When the US requested that their military planes be allowed to fly through

Cuban airspace for the purpose of evacuating Haitians to hospitals in Florida, Cuba immediately agreed. This deal cut the flight time from the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay to Miami by 90 minutes.

Australia's media monopolies simply ignore the generous assistance provided by socialist Cuba. They fall in behind the propaganda of US imperialism, with selected shots of the US military handing out food and water, or the Clintons flying in for a day. But, on the ground, everybody knows which countries are fair dinkum and which imperial power is using the situation to gain a new base in the Caribbean.

Australia helps Uribe's attack on international solidarity

-Contributed-

In recent months, there has been a worldwide and unprecedented escalation of harassment and persecution of activists who have shown support for the political struggles of the Colombian people.

This international campaign began soon after the murder of former FARC-EP leader Raúl Reyes in an illegal bombing raid in Ecuador. Alleged information from a "captured" laptop has been used for interrogating academics, journalists, human rights advocates, unionists and solidarity activists, in an attempt to simplistically link them with "terrorist activity."

On August 2008, film-maker and human rights defender Liliyany Obando (who toured Australia in two occasions) was detained and is yet to be tried. On May 2009, Professor Miguel Ángel Beltrán was illegally extradited from Mexico to Colombia, accused of being a "FARC-Intellectual" for his criticism of the Colombian government.

More than 7,500 political prisoners currently languish in Colombian prisons.

Outside Colombia, several human rights advocates and solidarity activists have been interrogated or harassed. In Spain on July 2008, peace activist María Remedios García was temporarily jailed for alleged links to the rebel organisation, and houses of Colombian activists in Switzerland were raided.

During 2008 and 2009, solidarity activists in Chile, Mexico and Peru were harassed, with their pictures constantly appearing in the national media without any incriminatory evidence.

In January this year, American writer and Colombia solidarity activist James Jordan was escorted out of a plane. US Homeland Security officials questioned him about solidarity work with Colombia.

In February this year, an Australian activist was also interrogated by the Australian Federal Police at the request of its Colombian counterpart. This was not the first time that an Australian



Columbia has more than 7,500 political prisoners

activist has been interrogated for solidarity work with Colombia. Without evidence and with only suspicion, this intelligence work is being carried out by local security and police forces

and violates the basic civil liberties of freedom of speech and freedom of organisation. It threatens the rights of people to demand much needed social justice.