



Dear CABA Members,

On July 29, 2020, Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody, the Chair of Florida's Statewide Council on Human Trafficking and Co-Chair of the Human Trafficking Committee of the National Association of Attorneys General, authored a letter to various U.S. Senators in relation to Senate Bill S.3977 and in against the human trafficking of Cuba's healthcare professionals through its overseas medical missions program. CABA applauds Attorney General Moody's commitment to championing human rights and to speaking out against exploitation by the Cuban government of its citizens.

To Read the full text of Attorney General Moody's Letter [Click Here](#)

It has also come to CABA's attention that there is a movement underway, supported by various high profile figures, to nominate a contingency of Cuba's overseas medical missions program for the Nobel Peace Prize. With respect to this initiative, CABA provides the following thoughts:

**THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE NOMINATION: THE CUBAN AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION'S CASE AGAINST EXPLOITATION**

An international campaign is underway to nominate Cuba's Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade for the Nobel Peace Prize. Thousands have signed online petitions and high-profile supporters include former Ecuador President Rafael Correa, actor Danny Glover and writer Alice Walker. The work of Cuban medical professionals, laboring under difficult conditions and often lacking basic medical supplies and sanitary facilities in their own country, is praiseworthy. But the Nobel Prize should never be used to perpetuate or celebrate exploitation.

International medical missions, like those of the Medical Brigade, are contracted for and undertaken by the Cuban government and are not motivated by fraternity and peace, but principally to advance the Cuban regime's economic agenda. Rather than serving to reduce Cuba's militarized presence abroad, the Cuban government actually uses these medical expeditions as a diplomatic brigade of white coats.

According to renowned scholar Dr. Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Cuba exports professional services, including healthcare, for its own economic benefit to offset a balance of goods deficit. In fact, when Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador recently ended the contracts of 9,624 Cuban physicians sent to work in those countries, the result was an annual loss of about \$1 billion for the Cuban government.

Nevertheless, professional services like these international medical programs remain Cuba's primary source of foreign revenue. Cuba's most valuable export is the human capital of its own citizens. Put simply: Cuba unabashedly traffics in exploited human capital for its economic gain. The "Oil for Doctors" program through which Cuba began purchasing Venezuelan oil for resale at below-market prices in exchange for exporting medical professionals to Venezuela is another example of Cuba's mercenary approach to social welfare.

In exporting its medical professionals abroad, Cuba commits labor abuses that are contrary to recognized international human rights law and norms. Cuban medical workers deploying to countries abroad typically receive an estimated 20% of the salaries that host countries actually pay for their assistance—a reduced wage, albeit more than they would be able to earn at hospitals within Cuba where a top salary is estimated at about \$60 a month. In late 2018, a federal lawsuit against the Pan American Health Organization ("PAHO") (an entity related to the World Health Organization) on behalf of Cuban physicians sent to work abroad in the similar program alleged that PAHO had collected over \$75 million since 2013 by enabling, managing, and enforcing illegal human trafficking of Cuban medical professionals in Brazil.

This lawsuit further alleges that Cuba recruits participants under threat of harsh social, economic, political, personal, reputational, and legal repercussions; separates the workers from their families; refuses to inform them where they will be sent and what work they will perform; restricts their movement; pays the workers a fraction of the total sums paid by the host country for their work; and in many cases withholds a portion of their wages as security until they return to Cuba. Upon arrival in third countries, Cuban medical professionals have been forced to turn over their passports to handler/coordinators in a presumptive effort to deter defection.

Moreover, it is understood that the labor contracts for Cuban medical professionals abroad are negotiated by an agency affiliated with the Cuban government, and not at arms-length by the doctors and nurses themselves or through counsel of their choosing. Participants report that they are not informed of the terms of their contracts, either, which may vary from country to country. As recently as late June 2020, both the United States Department of State and Florida Attorney General publicly condemned the exploitation of Cuba's medical professionals in its medical missions abroad. The "2020 Trafficking in Persons Report," authored by the United States of America's Department of State, similarly characterizes Cuba's foreign medical missions as forced labor programs.

By the award's own criteria, nominations for a Nobel Peace Prize should be considered for achievements that encourage noble intentions in furtherance of selfless devotion to equality and the promotion of peace. There is another group in Cuba that meets that criteria. First organized in 2003, *Las Damas de Blanco* (The Ladies in White), is a group of wives, daughters, mothers, sisters and their supporters that gather each Sunday and bravely and peacefully march for the freedom of family members who are detained and incarcerated

in Cuba as political prisoners.

Previously nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, *Las Damas de Blanco* remain worthy of the recognition after nearly two decades of peaceful demonstrations against the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of political dissidents in Cuba. Despite repeated state-sponsored antagonism, regular detentions, beatings, and organized violence against them, *Las Damas De Blanco* continue to embody the characteristics deserving of Nobel Peace Prize recognition.

The time to make the case against exploitation and in favor of advancing human rights is now, and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize speaks volumes to a world that is listening. CABA asks you to advocate for the noble intentions of those who the Cuban government actively seeks to silence, and not for a program built upon the lucrative trafficking of human capital abroad.

*This Statement was authored by Candice Balmori, Esq., Director of the Cuban American Bar Association (CABA) on behalf of its Board of Directors.*

Sincerely,

*Frances De La Guardia*

CABA President

