

# Cuba's response to the disaster in Haiti

Report from a visit to Cuba's medical brigade in Haiti



**Monday, 1st March 7.30pm**

**Venue: St Matthews Rooms, Carver St, Sheffield S1**

**Speaker: Phil Lenton, Coordinator of 'Salud International', a trade union-sponsored NGO**

['Salud': Spanish for 'Health']

More than 300 Cuban doctors were already in Haiti when the earthquake struck (since doubled by reinforcements). They immediately swung into action, reopening 3 hospitals in Port-au-Prince and attending to people where they lay.

Cuban doctors first arrived in Haiti in 1998, following the devastation caused by Hurricane Georges. In contrast to many international aid efforts that wind down after a few weeks or months, the Cuban doctors stayed and have been there ever since, providing free health care to a population which had only known expensive, private health care beyond the reach of the majority.

Unlike many other foreign doctors, the Cubans don't use armed guards; before the earthquake only the Cubans regularly visited people in their homes as others considered the security risk to be too great

Since 2000, 544 young Haitian doctors have graduated from Cuba's Latin American Medical School, among 10,000 free medical scholarships to youth from deprived communities in Latin America, the Caribbean and even the USA.

*"U.S. officials have blamed security concerns for holding up providing relief. Yet a team of Cuban doctors were seen treating hundreds of patients without a gun or soldier in sight."*

'Foreign policy posturing is not helping Haiti', Financial Times, January 19.

## **To donate to the Cuban medical brigade**

A Cuban bank account has now been opened to receive financial contributions to help sustain their medical teams working in Haiti. To support the Cuban efforts in Haiti directly you can make a donation via CSC and avoid the bank transfer fee. Donate by Credit Card at 0208 800 0155 or by sending a cheque (payable to 'CSC', with 'Cuban doctors in Haiti' on the back) to CSC c/o UNITE – Woodberry, 218 Green Lanes, London N4 2HB. All donations will be acknowledged.

**All meeting costs will be met by Sheffield Cuba Solidarity Campaign. All donations received at the meeting will help sustain the Cuban medical brigade in Haiti**

## **Fidel Castro on Haiti—“We send doctors, not soldiers”**

**Fidel Castro, January 14, two days after the earthquake struck:** *In the area of healthcare and others the Haitian people has received the cooperation of Cuba, even though this is a small and blockaded country. Approximately 400 doctors and healthcare workers are helping the Haitian people free of charge. Our doctors are working every day at 227 of the 237 communes of that country... no less than 400 young Haitians have been graduated as medical doctors in our country. ...Thus, up to one thousand doctors and healthcare personnel can be mobilized without any special effort; and most are already there.*



**Fidel Castro, January 24:** *Cuba will firmly stand by the opinion that the tragedy that has taken place in Haiti, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, is a challenge to the richest and more powerful countries of the world.*

*Haiti is a net product of the colonial, capitalist and imperialist system imposed on the world.*



Haitians waiting to see Cuban doctors at a free clinic in Cange in 2006

*Haiti's slavery and subsequent poverty were imposed from abroad. That terrible earthquake occurred after the Copenhagen Summit, where the most elemental rights of 192 UN member States were trampled upon.*

*In the midst of the Haitian tragedy, without anybody knowing how and why, thousands of US marines, 82nd Airborne Division troops and other military forces have occupied Haiti.*

*Worse still is the fact that neither the United Nations Organization*

*nor the US government have offered an explanation to the world's public opinion about this relocation of troops.... The UN should be entrusted with the leading role it deserves in these so delicate matters.*

*Our country is accomplishing a strictly humanitarian mission. To the extent of its possibilities, it will contribute the human and material resources at its disposal. The will of our people... is huge, and will rise to the occasion. We send doctors, not soldiers!*

**Seminar on Politics, Culture and Sexuality in Cuba, with Steve Wilkinson** (former editor of Cuba Sí & expert on contemporary Cuban fiction)

“Fresa y Chocolate” (Strawberries and Chocolate), pathbreaking and acclaimed Cuban film exploring homosexuality and homophobia, will be screened at 12.00.

Date: Saturday 13th March, 2.00 – 5.00 Venue: St Matthews Rooms, Carver St, Sheffield S1