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Haiti is putting the spirit of cooperation to the test

REFLECTION OF COMMANDER FIDEL CASTRO



THE news arriving from Haiti paints a picture of the tremendous chaos that was to be expected given the exceptional situation created by the disaster.

Initial surprise, shock, commotion, the desire in the most remote corners of the Earth to provide immediate aid. What to send and how to do so to a corner of the Caribbean, from China, India, Vietnam and other nations located tens of thousands of kilometers away? The magnitude of the earthquake and the country's poverty instantly generated ideas of imagined needs, which give rise to all kinds of promises that they then try to deliver by any possible means.

We Cubans understood that the most important thing at that point was to save lives, and we are trained not just to confront

catastrophes such as this one, but also natural disasters related to health.

Hundreds of Cuban doctors were there, plus a significant number of young, working-class Haitians who have become well-trained healthcare professionals, a task in which we have cooperated for many years with that neighboring sister nation. Some of our compatriots were on vacation, while others of Haitian origin were training or studying in Cuba.

The destruction caused by the earthquake exceeded all calculations; the humble adobe and mud homes – in a city with almost two million inhabitants – were unable to withstand it. Solidly constructed governmental buildings collapsed; whole blocks of houses crashed down upon their inhabitants who, at that time – as night was

2010 elektron 10 (21) 2, FTE de México

falling – were inside their homes and were buried, dead or alive, under the ruins. The streets full of people crying out for help. The MINUSTAH – the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti – the government and police were left leaderless or without headquarters. In the first moments, the main task of those institutions – incorporating thousands of people – was to find out who was still alive and where they were.

The immediate decision of our selfless doctors working in Haiti, as well as the young Haitian healthcare specialists who graduated in Cuba, was to communicate with each other, learn of each other's fate and find out what resources were available to assist the Haitian people in the midst of that tragedy.

Those who were at home on vacation in Cuba immediately got ready to leave for Haiti, as did Haitian doctors on specialist courses in our homeland. Other expert Cuban surgeons who have undertaken difficult missions offered to leave along with them. Suffice it to say that, in less than 24 hours, our doctors had already seen hundreds of patients. Today, January 16, just three-and-a-half days after the tragedy, the number of victims who have been seen has risen to several thousand.

At midday today – Saturday – the head of our medical brigade reported, among other data, the following information:

"...the work being done by our *compañeros* is really commendable. The unanimous opinion is that this puts the earthquake in Pakistan in the shade – there was another severe earthquake there and some of these doctors worked there – in that country; our doctors often saw patients with badly healed fractures and people whose bones had been crushed. But this has surpassed the imaginable: there have been an abundance of amputations, operations have practically been performed in public; the image is one of a war."

"...the Delmas 33 Hospital is now operational; it has three operating rooms, with electrical generators, consultation areas, et cetera, but it is completely full."

"...12 Chilean doctors have joined us; one of them is an anesthesiologist. There are also eight Venezuelan doctors and nine Spanish nuns. Eighteen Spaniards – to whom the UN and Haitian Health Ministry had handed over control of the hospital – were due to arrive, but they lacked emergency resources that hadn't as yet reached the area, and so they decided to join us and begin working immediately."

"... 32 Haitian resident doctors were sent and six of them were going directly to Carrefour, a place that has been totally devastated. Three Cuban surgical teams who arrived yesterday also traveled with them."

"...we are operating in the following medical facilities at Port-au-Prince:

La Renaissance Hospital.

The Social Security Hospital.

The Peace Hospital.

"...four Comprehensive Diagnostics Centers are already operational".

This information merely gives one idea of the work being undertaken by Cuban medical personnel and those from other countries working with them, who were among the first to arrive in that nation. Our medical personnel are willing to cooperate and join forces with all other healthcare specialists who have been sent to save lives in that sister nation. Haiti could become an example of what humanity can do for itself. The opportunity and means exist, but the will is lacking.

The longer it takes to bury or incinerate the dead and to distribute food and other vital

supplies, the higher the risk of epidemics and social violence breaking out.

In Haiti, it will be put to the test how long the spirit of cooperation will endure before egotism, chauvinism, petty interests and contempt for other nations prevail.

Climate change is threatening the whole of humanity. The earthquake in Port-au-Prince,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fidel Castro Ruz', enclosed within a large, sweeping, handwritten flourish that underlines the signature.

Fidel Castro Ruz

January 16, 2010
7:46 p.m.

Taken from Cubadebate
Source: www.granma.cuba.cu
Translated by Granma International

2010 elektron 10 (21) 3, FTE de México barely three weeks after the Copenhagen conference, reminds us all of how selfishly and arrogantly we behaved there.

Countries are taking a close look at everything that is taking place in Haiti. World opinion and that of the peoples will be increasingly harsher and more implacable.

Frente de Trabajadores de la Energía, de México
Energy Workers' Front, of Mexico