

New U.S. Sanctions Against Cuba's Healthcare Sector



Clinic held as part of the “Mais Médicos” program with Cuban doctors in Brazil (Source: [Marcello Casal Jr./ABr/Commons/CC-BY-SA 3.0](#))

On Thursday, the U.S. State Department imposed [new sanctions](#) against nine Cuban companies and two high-ranking government officials. The measures target, among other things, Cuba’s state-run program for overseas medical missions as well as companies in the energy sector. The State Department justified the steps by stating that they were intended to block the Cuban government’s access to “illegitimate sources of revenue.”

The Cuban medical mission program is at the center of the new measures. Sanctions were imposed on the state-run marketing company for medical services, Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos S.A. (CSMC); the Central Unit for Medical Cooperation (UCCM); its director, Gretza Sánchez Padrón; and Health Minister José Ángel Portal Miranda.

The U.S. State Department claims that the practice of remitting a portion of salaries to the Cuban government makes the deployment of Cuban doctors abroad a form of “slave labor.” Havana has rejected this characterization for years.

Two energy trading companies and the Centro de Investigaciones del Petróleo (CEINPET) were also sanctioned. The latter is currently conducting research into ways to refine domestic crude oil into fuel to make the country less dependent on imports.

In addition, several companies accused by Washington of circumventing existing U.S. sanctions were targeted: the Mariel Container Port Company, the country’s most important cargo port; the maritime service provider Coral Marítima S.A.; Ceiba Investments Limited, which operates in the tourism sector; and the money transfer company Orbit S.A.

The legal basis is an executive order signed by President Donald Trump on May 1, which authorizes punitive measures against individuals and companies accused of supporting the Cuban government or “jeopardizing U.S. national security.” All U.S. assets of those affected will be frozen. U.S. citizens and companies are generally prohibited from conducting business with them. Foreign companies and financial institutions that carry out certain transactions with the sanctioned parties also risk U.S. sanctions.

Cuba’s Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla [responded](#) sharply. “Every act of aggression by the U.S. government aims to impose collective punishment on the entire Cuban people,” he wrote on social media. He added that it is becoming “increasingly difficult to conceal the genocidal intentions and the desire to provoke a humanitarian crisis.” Washington denies that the embargo has any impact on the population.

Rodríguez described the sanctions against the medical program as “an act of aggression against the human right to access health care for hundreds of thousands of people in many parts of the world.” Cuba is being “punished for providing a humanitarian and solidarity-based service that is recognized by the international community,” the minister said.

According to data from the Cuban National Institute of Statistics (ONEI), exports of professional services accounted for more than 40 percent of the country’s total export value between 2018 and 2020. According to official figures, more than 600,000 Cuban professionals have worked in 165 countries since the medical brigades were founded over six decades ago. According to the latest available figures, approximately 24,000 healthcare professionals are currently deployed in 56 countries. In recent months, several governments in the Caribbean and Central America—including Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago—have already suspended their cooperation agreements with Cuba under pressure from the U.S.

These measures are part of a broad-based [pressure campaign](#) by the Trump administration under Secretary of State Marco Rubio. His department most recently [published](#) a document of about 100 pages titled “Cuba: The Capital of 21st-Century Communism.” The document purports to prove that Havana has been mobilizing left-wing forces worldwide against the U.S. for decades and ultimately seeks to “conquer” the United States.

The report also targets actors in Europe: German solidarity groups such as the Germany-Cuba Friendship Society are named in it, as are the participants in a solidarity flotilla that arrived in Havana in March carrying humanitarian aid.

In a [press release](#), the German network Cuba described the document as an “absurd conspiracy fantasy” and accused Washington of systematically “confusing cause and effect, perpetrators and victims.” The executive board called on the German federal government and the EU to clearly condemn “U.S. terrorism against Cuba” and to significantly increase emergency aid for the Cuban people. ([Cubaheute](#))