

NEWS ABOUT CHOLERA IN HAITI

There is a lot to talk about when the United States is embroiled in a colossal scandal as the result of the documents published by Wikileaks; nobody doubts their authenticity –notwithstanding any other motivation of that website.

However, at this time our country is immersed in a battle against cholera in Haiti, something that becomes a threat for all the other peoples of Latin America and the Third World.

In the midst of the consequences of an earthquake that killed and injured more than half a million persons and caused enormous destruction, an epidemic broke out that, almost immediately, was aggravated by the ravages of a hurricane.

The number of persons affected by the disease was going up yesterday, on November 29th, to 75,888; of these, the Cuban Medical Brigade looked after 27,015, with 254 deaths for 0.94 %. The rest of the state hospital facilities, the NGOs and the private ones, looked after 48,875; of these, 1,467 died for 3.0015%.

Today, November 30th, the Cuban Medical Mission which has 201 graduates of the Latin American School of Medicine in its ranks looked after 521 cholera patients, for a total of 27,536.

Last Sunday, November 28th, 18 persons in very critical condition arrived at the Centre for Cholera treatment, in the community reference hospital, located in the commune of L'Estere in Artibonite Department; they were from a sub-commune called Plateau and were immediately cared for by the Cuban Medical Brigade's 11 doctors and 12 nurses who were working there. Fortunately they were able to save the lives of all of them.

On Monday the 29th, 11 more cases arrived from the same sub-commune; among them was a five-year-old child whose parents had died from cholera. Again, their lives were saved.

Faced with such a situation, Dr. Somarriba, chief of the Medical Mission, decided to send an all-terrain vehicle with 5 doctors, 2 nurses, one male nurse and a rehabilitation specialist to the sub-commune with the resources necessary to provide emergency treatment for the cases there.

Of the five doctors, four are ELAM graduates: a Uruguayan, a Paraguayan, a Nicaraguan, a Haitian and the Cuban brigade chief from the Artibonite Department.

They travelled six kilometres on the highway, walked six more kilometres along the embankment and finally another two kilometres over rough terrain carrying all the equipment and resources in order to reach the sub-commune.

Plateau is located among five mountains, with humble houses clustered at three points; the number of inhabitants is calculated to be around five thousand. They tell me there are no streets or electricity or stores, and just one Protestant church.

The extremely poor population basically grows peanuts, millet, beans and squash.

When they arrived in Plateau, the church's pastor offered to organize a treatment centre inside the church, with six cots and four pews, thus allowing for emergency treatment for 10 persons.

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastroruz.biz>)

Today eight were admitted, three of them in critical condition.

The villagers say that around 20 have died. Those figures do not appear in the official death toll. During the night they will work under the light of flashlights they brought in.

The Mission decided to set up a 24-bed Cholera Medical Centre in that remote community. Tomorrow all the resources shall be sent there, including the electrical generator.

There was also information about camera crews going to the community when they heard about the news.

Today there were no deaths and another centre was opened up in the north, for a total of 38 centres and units to treat cholera.

I mention this case to explain the circumstances and methods with which they are fighting the epidemic over there, an epidemic that with dozens of people dying every day is now coming close to 2,000 casualties.

With the work methods being used and the scheduled reinforcements, it shall be more difficult for the number of deaths to stay at the former rate.

Being aware of the passions that traditional electoral processes bring with them, besides the typical abstentions that characterize many of them, we were concerned about what could happen in Haiti in the midst of the epidemic's destruction. A basic and never-to-be-violated principle is respect for law, the parties and the religious beliefs of the countries where our doctors of the Henry Reeve Brigade provide their services.

However, we were worried about the versions that were being widely circulated by the international press, presenting a picture of generalized violence in the country, something far from being reality. International observers were astounded by that news being spread abroad when actually the facts that occasioned them were isolated, affecting only a small percentage of the electors who voted.

The leaders themselves that called the people into the streets understood that it was not correct, in the middle of the country's tragic situation, to do things that could encourage violent confrontations that would make it impossible to control and overcome the epidemic. If that aim is not achieved, this could become endemic and lead to a health disaster in Haiti and a permanent threat for the Caribbean area, as well as for Latin America, where millions of poor in growing numbers are agglomerating in the large cities; and likewise for many other poor nations in Asia and Africa.

Never forget that Haiti also has to be rebuilt right from its foundations, with the help and cooperation of all. It is what we expect for its noble and self-sacrificing people.

Fidel Castro Ruz
November 30, 2010
9:34 p.m.

Date:

30/11/2010

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Published on FIDEL Soldier of Ideas (<http://www.fidelcastroruz.biz>)

Source URL: <http://www.fidelcastroruz.biz/en/articulos/news-about-cholera-haiti>