

# Dominic Raab Thanks Cuba for Coronavirus Assistance

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*Dominic Raab, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, thanked the Cuban Government today in parliament for their assistance with the stricken British cruise ship the MS Braemar which had passengers with possible coronavirus infections.*

He made the ministerial statement to MPs in parliament today

“I spoke to the Cuban Foreign Minister twice over the weekend and we are very grateful to the Cuban government for swiftly enabling this operation and for their close cooperation to make sure it could be successful.”

Cuba will allow the British ship MS Braemar to dock in Havana facilitating the mainly British passengers to disembark and fly home. This is after a number of other countries, including the Bahamas and Barbados, refused permission to dock because a number of passengers were infected with coronavirus.

The Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs said of its decision:

“These are times of solidarity, of understanding health as a human right, of reinforcing international cooperation to face our common challenges, values that are inherent in the humanistic practice of the Revolution and of our people.”

This gesture once again illustrates Cuba’s internationalist outlook of solidarity and friendship. At the same time it once again highlights the stark contrast between Cuba and the disgraceful actions of the United States. At a time when the world community must pull together to share resources and knowledge in the fight against coronavirus the US continues to implement its disastrous 60 year old blockade of the island.

The blockade stops companies and countries from across the globe from trading with Cuba and punishes those that do so with huge multi million dollar fines. The blockade seriously impacts across Cuba affecting the daily lives of the people. The effects are most keenly felt across the hospitals and clinics where much needed medicines and equipment are in short supply.

Despite the US blockade Cuba prioritises its health service which has managed to find ways to deliver excellent results mainly through an extensive primary care programme. Cuba has also developed its own large bio pharmaceutical industry to produce many of the medicines

that it is not able to buy abroad.

It has developed and produces a number of medicines including the antiviral drug Interferon Alpha 2B, that could save thousands of lives in the COVID-19 pandemic. The medicine has been produced in China in a Cuban-Chinese joint venture, and so far, has managed to effectively treat more than 1,500 patients from the coronavirus there. Interferon is one of 30 drugs chosen by the Chinese National Health Commission to combat the respiratory disease and is now being used by many other countries including South Korea, Panama, Italy and Germany. It is also being requested by many other countries for use in their response to the current pandemic.

Cuba has also just sent a brigade of medical professionals to Italy, after requests from the Italian government, to assist in the fight against coronavirus. This is the latest in a long history of international medical solidarity including working with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Western Africa in the fight against the Ebola epidemic.

The UK has no sanctions in place against Cuba yet UK companies and individuals are blocked from trading with the island due to the extraterritorial sanctions imposed by the United States. While the UK Government votes against the blockade at the United Nations each year, the British government needs to do much more in opposing the US policy and protecting British companies trading with Cuba.

Rob Miller, CSC Director said

“Cuba is now at the forefront of the international battle against coronavirus and the wonderful humanitarian response to the plight of the passengers of the MS Braemar once again illustrates Cuba’s policies of internationalism and solidarity. At the same time it shines a light on the disastrous United States policy of aggression and blockade that hinders the ability of Cuban health professionals to assist in the worldwide battle against coronavirus.

“Cuba has experience, skills, medical personnel, and medicines that could assist in the world wide battle against coronavirus. It is imperative that the demand for an end to the US Blockade is raised at this time.”

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