

Venezuela's debt to Cuba

By [Salim Lamrani](#)

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The Venezuelan oligarchy vehemently criticizes President Chávez for providing fuel assistance to the government in Havana. It is true that Cuba receives 98 thousand barrels of petroleum daily at preferential prices. Nevertheless the Caribbean nation is not the only nation benefiting from favorable agreements. The majority of the countries in that region including Haiti, Jamaica and Nicaragua also enjoy this political solidarity. London as well as various United States cities are also recipients of Venezuela's generosity without it stirring up such controversy. (1).

Chávez personally responded to these attacks during his television program "Aló, Presidente" on September 30, 2007. According to him, the debt that Venezuelans have incurred with Cuba is much greater than the fuel assistance provided to the island. "Those who [...] accuse me of giving away fuel to Cuba [are] foolish. If the account were tallied, bolívar for bolívar, cent for cent ..." the president recalled that 30 thousand Cuban doctors have been working in the country on a free and volunteer basis for more than five years. He confirmed that Cuban professionals have saved more lives in those five years than Venezuelan doctors have throughout the entire medical history of Venezuela. "This has no price," he emphasized. "What is worth more in objective value, the barrels of oil that we sell to Cuba or this?" he asked (2).

Currently around 9 million people have benefited from medical attention provided by the Cuban doctors, who have performed more than 60 million consultations throughout the country. The health mission "Barrio Adentro" (Inside the Barrio) has ensured that all Venezuelans have free and universal access to medical services. The establishment of preventative medicine saved the lives of 1,153 children in 2007, according to the Ministry of Health. (3)



Thanks to the presence of the Cuban doctors and the political will of Chávez six new hospitals are being built in the states of Barinas, Mérida, Guárico, Miranda, Apure and in the capital. Barrio Adentro has entered its fourth phase. The government plans to invest a sum of 800 million Euros (2,500 million Bolívares) in the Public Health System. (4)

Chávez also announced a 60% salary increase for Venezuelan doctors who work for the state beginning November 1, 2007. "I know that doctors' salaries were falling behind. [...]. It's justice for those who work for Venezuelans' health," he declared. (5) He also emphasized that this economic effort is made possible by the raising oil prices. (6) Of course, the Colegio de Médicos de Venezuela (medical College of Venezuela) expressed satisfaction. (7) The minimum salary for a new doctor starting out in the public system will now be 822 Euros per month which is an extremely high salary for a Third World country. (8)

Professors have not been left out. The Ministry of Public Education also decided to raise its salaries by 40% effective November 1, 2007. (9)

In contrast, President Bush, under the pretext of fiscal restraint, vetoed legislation passed by the Congress that would have provided access to medical attention for poor children, while spending billions of dollars on the illegitimate and murderous occupation of Iraq. The societal views of Chávez and Bush are mirror opposites: the well-being of the neediest on one side and the profits of multinationals on the other. (10)

In order to combat excessive alcohol and tobacco consumption and to thus reduce related public health problems, the Venezuelan government decided to raise the tax on liquor by 50% and on cigarettes by 70%. "Our country has one of the highest rates of whiskey consumption," he lamented. Sales of beer on the street will be prohibited from now on. This arsenal of measures forms part of the preventative policy promoted by the government to improve the health of Venezuelans. (11)

Cuba and Venezuela have once again strengthened regional integration by signing 14 new cooperative economic agreements on October 15, 2007. (12) Provoking the ire of the Venezuelan opposition, during his speech Hugo Chávez reiterated his admiration for Cuba: "Fidel is a father for our people. Cuba is an example for our revolution. Venezuela loves Cuba. Our people love the Cuban people and are very grateful to them." (13) Later, addressing his detractors, he asked: "how much would we have to pay any other country to provide 30 thousand doctors, nurses, ophthalmologists and dentists, 24 hours a day, dispersed throughout the entire the territory [...]? That can someone tell me that!" (14)

The integration between Cuba and Venezuela is a model that should be followed on the rest of the continent. It is the only way to protect against the threats of Washington, achieve real independence and improve the people's standard of living.

Article in french, [La dette du Venezuela à l'égard de Cuba](#), October 18th, 2007.

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Notes

(1) Mauricio Vicent, «El presidente de Venezuela alude en Cuba a una confederación entre los dos países», El País, October 16, 2007.

(2) Associated Press, «Chávez asegura que Venezuela tiene deuda con Cuba», October 1, 2007.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, «Arrancó Barrio Adentro IV con la construcción de 6 hospitales especializados», September 30, 2007.

- (5) Associated Press, «Chávez anuncia incremento salarial a médicos en Venezuela», October 8, 2007.
- (6) Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, «Chávez anunció incremento salarial de 60% para médicos», October 8, 2007.
- (7) Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, «Colegio Médico del Distrito Metropolitano conforme con aumento de 60%», October 9, 2007.
- (8) Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, «Médicos satisfechos con aumento de sueldo del 60%», October 9, 2007.
- (9) Associated Press, «Chávez anuncia incremento salarial a maestros en Venezuela», October 5, 2007.
- (10) David Stout, «Bush Defends Veto of Health Care Bill», The New York Times, October 15, 2007.
- (11) Christopher Toothaker, «Chávez la emprende contra la bebida y el consumismo», Associated Press, October 9, 2007.
- (12) Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, «Venezuela y Cuba suscriben 14 nuevos acuerdos de integración», October 15, 2007.
- (13) Granma, «Estamos en las mejores condiciones Cuba y Venezuela para avanzar en un proceso unitario. Discurso de Hugo Chávez Frías, Presidente de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, en el acto de firma de acuerdos entre Venezuela y Cuba, efectuado en el Palacio de las Convenciones, el 15 de octubre de 2007, “Año 49 de la Revolución”», October 16, 2007.
- (14) Associated Press, «Chávez asegura que Venezuela tiene deuda con Cuba», op. cit.

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