

NOTHING CAN BE IMPROVISED IN HAITI

Five days ago I read a press report stating that Ban Ki-moon would appoint Bill Clinton as his special envoy for Haiti.

According to the report, Clinton accompanied the Secretary General on a two-day official visit to Haiti on March last in order to support the development program that had been designed by the government of Port of Prince, aimed at awakening the lethargic Haitian economy.

The report stated that the ex president had maintained a remarkable philanthropic commitment with the Caribbean nation through the Clinton Global Initiative.

It likewise stated that the ex president had said he was honored to accept the Secretary General's invitation to become the special envoy for Haiti.

Clinton reportedly stated that the people and the government of Haiti had the capacity to recover from the serious damages caused by the four tropical storms that devastated that country last year.

The day after, the same news agency reported that Mrs. Clinton, the Secretary of State, had said with joy that Bill was an outstanding envoy. The UN Secretary General was said to confirm Clinton's appointment as his new special envoy for Haiti. He said they both had been together in that country and that Clinton's presence had helped to raise awareness within the international community on the problems facing that Caribbean nation.

He added that the UN was afraid that, after a period of several years of a relative calm, propped up by the MINUSTAH, political instability could set in the country again.

The new press report repeats again the story of the four hurricanes and storms that caused 900 deadly casualties, left 800 000 victims, and destroyed the scarce civil infrastructure that existed in that country.

The history of Haiti and its tragedy is far more complex.

Haiti was the second country of this hemisphere after the United States -which proclaimed its sovereignty in 1776- that conquered its independence in 1804. In the case of the US, the white descendants from the settlers who founded the Thirteen British Colonies, who were fervent, austere and cultured religious believers and owned land and slaves, shook off the British colonial yoke and enjoyed their national independence. But this was not the case for the autochthonous population, the African slaves or their descendants, who were denied every right, regardless of the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Philadelphia.

In Haiti, where more than 400 000 slaves worked for 30 000 white owners, the men and women submitted to that heinous system, for the first time in the history of humankind, were able to abolish slavery, maintain an independent State and defend it by struggling against soldiers who had brought the European monarchies to their knees.

That period coincided with the boom of capitalism and the emergence of powerful colonial empires that managed to dominate the lands and the seas of the planet for centuries.

Haitians are not to blame for their current status of poverty; they were rather the victims of a system

that was imposed on the whole world. They did not invent colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, unequal exchange, neo-liberalism or any of the forms of exploitation and plundering that have prevailed in this planet during the last 200 years.

Haiti has an area of 27 750 square kilometers and, according to some reliable estimates, in the year 2009 the population reached the figure of 9 million inhabitants. The number of inhabitants per square kilometer of arable land has increased to 885, one of the highest in the world, without the existence of any industrial development or resources that would allow it to acquire a minimum amount of material goods indispensable for life.

Fifty three per cent of the population lives in the countryside; firewood and charcoal are the only household fuels available to most Haitian families, which hinders reforestation. The absence of forests, where the soil gets spongy with the leaves, twigs and roots and helps to retain water, facilitates the human and economic damages that heavy rains cause to neighborhoods, roads and crops. Hurricanes, as is known, cause significant additional damage which will be ever greater if the climate keeps on changing so quickly. This is a secret to no one.

Our cooperation with the Haitian people began ten years ago, precisely when hurricanes George and Mitch battered the Caribbean and some Central American countries.

René Preval was then the President of Haiti and Jean-Bertrand Aristide was the Head of Government. The first contingent of 100 Cuban doctors was sent on December 4, 1998. The figure of Cuban health collaborators in Haiti was later on increased to more than 600.

It was on that occasion when the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), where more than 12 000 youths are currently studying, was created. Ever since then, the Haitian youths have been granted hundreds of scholarships by the School of Medicine of Santiago de Cuba, one of the most experienced in the country.

The number of primary schools in Haiti had increased and progress was being made. Even the most humble families were eager to send their children to school, for that was the only hope that they could overcome poverty and work inside or outside their country. The Cuban medicine training program was very much welcomed. The youths who were selected to study in Cuba had a good basic training, an inheritance perhaps of the achievements attained by France in that field. They should spend one year taking a pre-medical course, which also included the Spanish language. That has become a good reserve of quality physicians.

Five hundred and thirty three Haitian youths have graduated from our medical schools as specialists in General Comprehensive Medicine; 52 of them are currently in Cuba, studying a second specialty that is required right now. Another group of 527 are filling the vacancies that were granted to the Republic of Haiti.

Four hundred and thirteen Cuban health professionals are currently offering their services, free of charge, to the people of that sister nation. The Cuban doctors are present in all 10 departments of that country and in 127 of the 137 communities. More than 400 Haitian doctors who have been trained in Cuba, as well as the students from the last year of the career who are doing their practice in Haiti are also offering their services –side by side with our doctors- which make up a big total of 800 Haitian youths devoted to offer medical assistance in their homeland. That force will grow ever bigger with the new Haitian graduates.

It was a tough challenge; the Cuban doctors had to cope with difficult problems. The infant mortality was above 80 per every one thousand live births; life expectancy was below 60 years of age; the prevalence of AIDS among adults in the year 2007 reached the figure of 120 000 citizens. Tens of thousands of children and adults of different ages still die every year from communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, diarrhea, dengue and malnutrition, just to mention some indicators. Even the HIV

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is already a disease doctors can combat, thus guaranteeing the life of patients. But this can not be achieved in a single year; it is indispensable to have a health culture, which the Haitian people are acquiring with greater interest. The progress observed shows that it is possible to improve health indicators in a significant way.

Thirty seven thousand one hundred and nine patients have undergone eye surgery in three ophthalmologic centers that were created in Haiti. Those complex cases that can not be operated on there are sent to Cuba, where they are assisted at absolutely no cost.

Thanks to the Venezuelan economic cooperation, 10 Comprehensive Diagnosis Centers are being built, which are equipped with state-of-the-art technology that has already been acquired.

Far more important than the resources that could be mobilized by the international community, are the human beings that make use of those resources.

Our modest support to the people of Haiti has been possible despite of the fact that the hurricanes mentioned by Clinton battered us as well. Solidarity is a good evidence of what the world has lacked.

We could likewise speak of Cuba's contribution to the literacy programs and other projects, despite our limited economic resources. But I do not want to expand on this; nor is there any desire to do it just to speak about our contribution. I focused on health because it is an unavoidable topic. We are not afraid that others do what we are doing. The Haitian youths who are being trained in Cuba are becoming the priests of health required more and more by that sister nation.

What matters the most is the creation of new forms of cooperation, so much in need by this selfish world. The UN agencies can attest to the fact that Cuba is contributing what they describe as Health Comprehensive Programs.

Nothing can be improvised in Haiti, and nothing will result from the philanthropic spirit of any institution.

The project of the Latin American School of Medicine was later joined by the new training program in Cuba for doctors coming from Venezuela, Bolivia, the Caribbean and other countries of the Third World, as long as their respective health programs required it urgently. Today, there are more than 24 000 youths from the Third World studying Medicine in our homeland. By helping others we have also developed ourselves in that field and we have become an important force. That, and not the brain drain, is what we practice! Could the rich and super-developed G-7 countries say the same? Others will follow our example! No one should ever doubt that!

Fidel Castro Ruz

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