

## From the Source: Cuba's Health Minister on 'SICKO' and More

By Gail Reed

Havana, June 15—Cuban Health Minister Dr. José Ramón Balaguer said it wasn't Cuba's intention to promote its health services by allowing Michael Moore to bring patients here for the filming of 'SICKO', Moore's new documentary on the US health crisis. "From the human(istic) perspective, we're open to receiving any patients needing our health services," said the Minister in an e-mail response to a Reuters reporter in Havana. But Balaguer admitted that "such a film by a noted person like Moore undoubtedly brings the world a better sense of our humanistic principles."

The Cuban Minister was joined Friday morning by other prominent Cuban health and international cooperation authorities for a first-ever marathon of Internet questions from the world over on the topic of Cuba's global health cooperation.

During the two-hour session, the group was peppered with some 250 messages from 60 countries. Dubbed *Birthright to Life: Cuba's International Health Cooperation*, organizers said most of the questions were sympathetic to Cuba's programs, which now post some 30,000 health professionals in 70 countries, and train over 50,000 medical students from developing nations.

"But we know that everybody doesn't look at our (global health) cooperation the same way, nor share our values," Dr. Yiliam Jiménez, Deputy Foreign Minister for Cooperation told *Cuba Health Reports*. "So we're open to dialogue and debate, and that's part of what this session is all about."



Drs. Yiliam Jiménez (left) and José Ramón Balaguer (right) at the digital forum.



Dr. Juan Carrizo, Rector of Latin American Medical School: "Most of my messages were requesting applications."

"Many messages have asked us how we, as a poor country, can manage to sponsor such an ambitious [global cooperation program](#) in health," said Balaguer. "The reason is that for us, health isn't a bureaucratic job: it's the essence of what we are about, of our principles."

Dr. Juan Carrizo, Rector of Havana's [Latin American Medical School](#), with an enrollment of 10,000 from 29 countries, said many of the messages he received during the digital forum were young people in Latin America and Africa asking for applications to the school.

Cuba has been criticized for sending 20,000 of Cuba's over 70,000 doctors abroad. But Jiménez says the government is mindful of its commitment to the Cuban population. "Our people deserve better, and they deserve the best," she told *CHR*.

"Our people are accustomed to their right to health care, and now they are demanding not just any healthcare, but the best healthcare. And that's our biggest challenge: excellence in health services. In other countries, we are helping them get started along the path to the right to health care. But in our own country, this challenge of excellence is much bigger, the toughest."

### For more, see:

Cuban site for global cooperation: [www.coop.com](http://www.coop.com)

¡SALUD! US documentary film on Cuban cooperation: [www.saludthefilm.net](http://www.saludthefilm.net)

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