

TO ALL MEDIA
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KZN Cuban trained Doctors pay tribute to the late President Fidel Castro

In a moving tribute at Grey's Hospital; KZN Cuban trained Doctors and Specialists who are Cuban nationals hailed the late President Fidel Castro as a selfless and visionary revolutionary.

They were joined by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo and his counterpart in Agriculture and Rural Development, MEC Themba Mthembu who is also the Provincial Secretary of the South African Communist Party.

Here it was emphasised that Cuba is an ally of the South African nation and that it has done so much to uplift the health status of the citizens of this country.

Similarities were drawn between this country's icon, President Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro as well as the strong bond they shared.

In invoking the names of both these revolutionaries it was recalled that after his release from prison in 1990, Mandela travelled to Cuba to meet his friend, Fidel Castro where Mandela said:

‘We have come here today recognizing our great debt to the Cuban people.

What other country has such a history of selfless behaviour as Cuba has shown for the people of Africa?

How many countries benefit from Cuban health care professionals and educators?

How many of these volunteers are now in Africa?

What country has ever needed help from Cuba and has not received it?

In Africa we are used to being victims of countries that want to take from us our territory or overthrow our sovereignty.

In African history there is not another instance where another people have stood up for one of ours.

We also acknowledge that the action was carried out by the masses in Cuba and that those who fought and died in Angola are only a small portion of those who volunteered to go.’

President Fidel Castro was quoted as having said that throughout their involvement in Angola and Africa, they never took any diamond or gold but only the remains of their dead soldiers back.

Cuba was also hailed for not only contributing to African independence, freedom, and justice but for its continuing support in equipping this country to deal with a meander of diseases it is faced with.

Mandela and Castro pact, now known as SA-Cuba Health Cooperation Agreement made it possible for Cuba to assist in tackling South Africa's problem of the shortage of doctors. This

was made possible by the fact that Cuba has a total of 22 Medical Schools for its 11 million citizens whilst South Africa only has eight for its 52 million population.

MEC Dhlomo in praising Cuba's intervention in the training of doctors said:

Today we are proud to state that Castro made it possible for so many of our doctors from poor backgrounds to break the chains of poverty in their families. They are now working in our health system, improving access of health to the people. Most of those are working in rural hospitals and clinics where South African trained doctors and specialists refuse to go.'

He continued to give statistics indicating that KZN has been the biggest beneficiary of this collaboration that took effect in 1996. To date, a total of 940 students have been on the Cuban Medical Training Programme from KwaZulu-Natal Province alone with 104 having completed and 743 still in training at various levels of study.

Dhlomo also thanked Cuba for providing this Province with qualified Cuban doctors and specialists, some of whom were present at the service. He pointed out that KZN is a recipient of a total of 33 of those doctors deployed mainly in rural hospitals. To these doctors MEC Dhlomo said:

I also personally thank you as your presence and availability there has curtailed the movement and transportation of patients from the rural areas to tertiary hospitals in the cities just to receive medical attention. People are now getting advanced quality health care in District hospitals closer to their homes.

These are highly qualified doctors offer disciplines that were never dreamt would be available in such areas, for instance Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery; Ear, Nose and Throat Speciality; Maxillofacial Surgery; Dermatology and Urology



MEC Dhlomo and Mthembu with Cuban trained doctors

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