

## Cuba Raises MD's Salaries By Up to 150%

The government of Raul Castro adopted a wage hike for doctors working in Cuba that increases the income of the most qualified by more than 150 percent, according to information released today in the official media.

The long awaited measure sees the most highly trained specialists receiving the equivalent of US \$60 a month, up from \$23. Nevertheless, even with the raise the state sector wages remain very low, reported dpa news. President Raul Castro announced over a month ago that a raise was coming, taking advantage of the funds derived from Cuba doctors contracted to work abroad, especially in Venezuela and Brazil. The Council of Ministers approved on Wednesday a "substantial increase" according to the official press. "The biggest winners will be the doctors, dentists and nurses," said Vice President Marino Murillo, who heads the commission of the market economic reforms taking place on the island. State media published a table that lists the new monthly salaries, ranging from just over \$60 to the highest to \$22 for a basic nurse. The new wages will begin to be paid in June, corresponding to the May salaries. With this, doctors will be among the highest paid workers in the state sector on the island. For years Raul Castro has been saying that those that produce more should be earning more.

"Let's keep in mind that to achieve the essential principle to distribute wealth we must first create it, and to do so we have to steadily increase efficiency and productivity," said Castro in February in a speech to the Federation of Cuban Workers.

The new salaries of doctors, however, remain very low for example in relation to the income of some people who work in tourism or in the emerging private sector. The island has issued licenses to some 450,000 self-employed, who work mainly in the food and small services sectors. According to the success of the business, some of these people can earn several hundred dollars a month. (No statistic has been forthcoming as to how many of the total figure of self-employed has had to turn in their licenses because their effort was a failure). Despite extensive subsidies for basic services, Cubans complain that government salaries are not enough to live on. Many people get by receiving remittances from relatives abroad. The announcement of salary increases for doctors also has benefited those working in missions in other countries. Among other measures, "the hard currency (CUC) payments for the thousands of employees in Venezuela will be doubled," said Granma daily. Recently, the Brazilian authorities reported that Cuba rose to \$1,250 the salary of their physicians in Brazil, where some 11,430 are now located. Source: havanatimes