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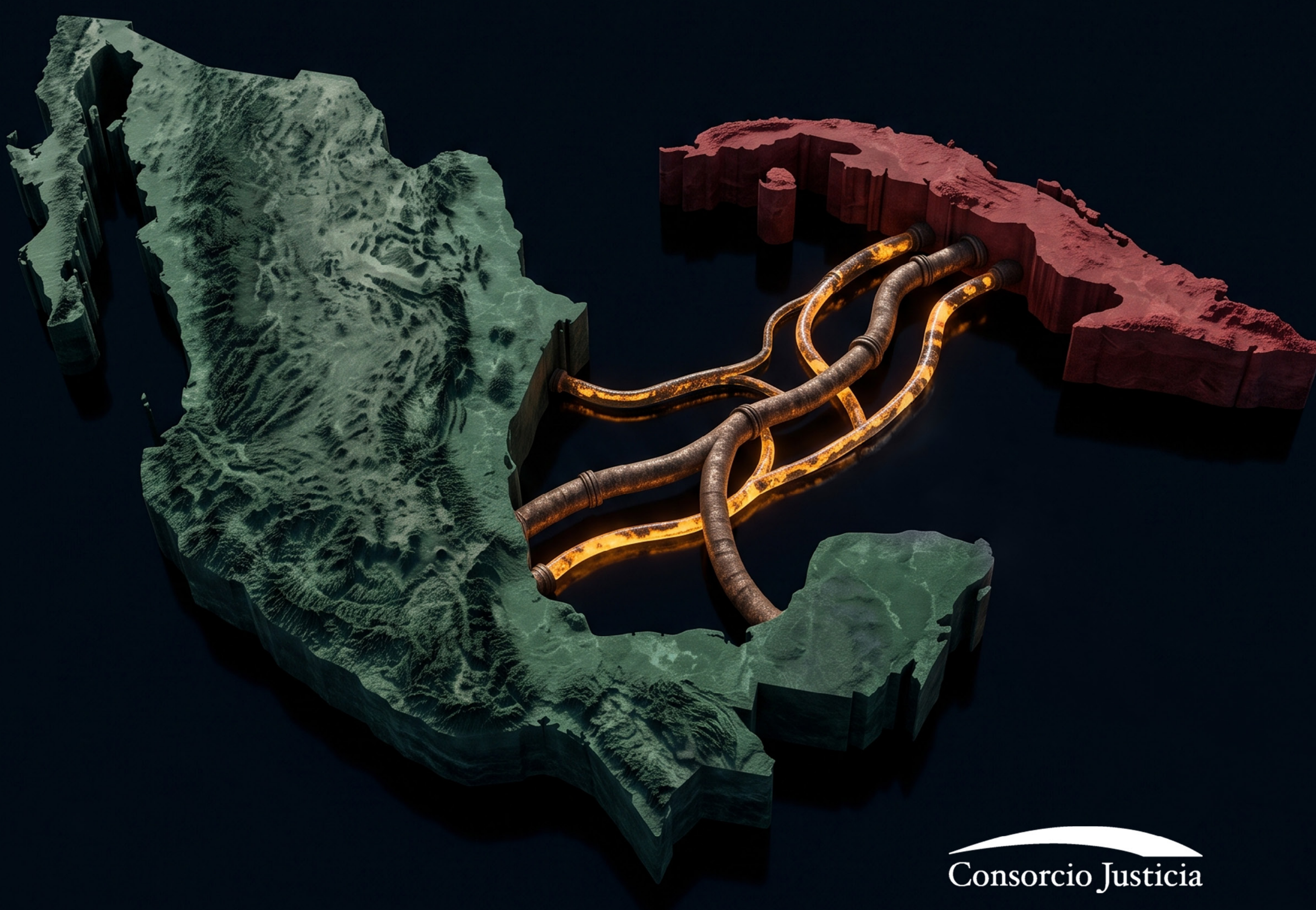
Opacity, Absence of Checks and Balances, and the Disappearance of the INAI. Documentary analysis on transparency, public resources and human rights in the bilateral cooperation framework 2022–2026



Consorcio Justicia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes the cooperation agreements signed between Mexico and Cuba during the 2022–2026 period, documenting how their implementation has coincided with a process of weakening transparency and accountability mechanisms in Mexico. The research argues that the elimination of the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection (INAI), together with the concentration of power in the Executive Branch and the limited legislative and judicial oversight, has allowed the execution of agreements in the areas of health, education, tourism, energy, and humanitarian assistance without sufficient public information about their costs, scope, or outcomes. The data presented below, documented through official, journalistic, and international organization sources, do not include other classified agreements that the Mexican government has not made public.

This report documents, with verifiable sources, the following data on Mexico-Cuba bilateral cooperation during the 2022–2026 period:

HEALTH AGREEMENT

- More than 2.5 billion pesos allocated to the Cuban physicians program in Mexico, with no impact assessment published by any federal agency.

- 1.576 billion pesos awarded to Cuba for medications without competitive international bidding.
- An additional 2.004 billion pesos in 2025 solely for lodging, meals, and transportation for Cuban medical personnel.
- The Cuban state retains between 75% and 95% of the agreed salary; on average, the professional receives only between 5% and 25% of what is stipulated in the contract.
- At the time the complaints were filed, there were 51,000 unemployed Mexican physicians while the government was contracting Cuban professionals, citing a shortage of personnel.

ENERGY AGREEMENT

- Between 2023 and 2025, Mexico transferred oil to Cuba worth more than 1.5 billion dollars (367 million in 2023, 600 million in 2024, and 496 million in 2025), confirmed in Pemex's reports to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).
- During the same period, power outages in Cuba went from 12 hours per day to more than 22 hours in Havana, with blackouts lasting up to two consecutive days in the country's interior.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

- More than 4,800 metric tons of aid sent to Cuba since February 2026, the details of which were classified as restricted for five years at the Cuban government's request.
- A donation of nearly 35 million dollars for the Sembrando Vida program in Cuba, with no independent mechanism to verify the final destination of the resources.

INSTITUTIONAL OPACITY

- 111 million pesos awarded through direct assignment, without competitive bidding, to Neuronic Mexicana S.A., a company linked to the Cuban state conglomerate BioCubaFarma.

- The INAI's successor, "Transparencia para el Pueblo" (Transparency for the People), denies access to information in 99.6% of cases, with a budget equivalent to only 2.3% of what the INAI had.
- Citizens' appeals fell by 60% in the first year of the new agency's operation.

GAESA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- GAESA, the military conglomerate that controls at least 70% of the Cuban economy, is the true counterpart in the agreements. Its revenues exceed the Cuban state budget by more than three times, and it cannot be audited even by the Cuban government itself.
- The European Parliament, the United Nations Special Rapporteurs, and the IACHR have documented that Cuban medical missions constitute a form of modern slavery and forced labor. Mexico appears in the reports as a co-responsible country.

The magnitude of these public resources contrasts with the absence of independent mechanisms to evaluate their destination, impact, and compliance with stated objectives. Beyond the figures, this report examines the political, economic, and human rights implications of this bilateral cooperation, and argues that the lack of transparency limits citizens' capacity for oversight and could facilitate the discretionary use of public resources to the benefit of Cuban state structures. Accordingly, the report recommends restoring autonomous access-to-information bodies, strengthening legislative and judicial oversight of international agreements, ensuring independent audits of public resource use, and promoting greater participation by civil society and independent media to guarantee transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights in the Mexico-Cuba bilateral relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2022 and 2026, the Mexican government transferred public resources to Cuba amounting to more than 1.5 billion dollars in oil alone, over 2.5 billion pesos in medical services, and nearly 35 million dollars in declared humanitarian assistance. None of those amounts were subject to independent legislative debate. None have a public audit of results. And the body that for two decades could have demanded one—the National Institute of Transparency, Access to Information and Personal Data Protection was eliminated in 2024. What this report documents is not only the size of that transfer: it is the institutional architecture that made it possible and that makes it, for now, impossible to reverse.

The relationship between Mexico and Cuba did not begin in 2022, nor with any recent agreement. Their diplomatic ties have been uninterrupted since 1902, when Cuba gained independence and Mexico was one of the first nations to recognize the new Cuban state. What has changed is not the existence of that relationship, but its nature, its opacity, and the institutional context in which it now unfolds.

During the Cold War, Mexico built a stance that would prove singular in the hemisphere. In 1961, the Mexican government led protests at the United Nations against the Bay of Pigs invasion, repeatedly opposed OAS sanctions against Cuba, and in 1964 became the only member of the organization to reject the U.S. initiative to break diplomatic relations with Havana. This position was grounded in the Estrada Doctrine, the principle of non-intervention and self-determination. But it also had a more pragmatic dimension: Cuba served Mexico as a banner of diplomatic independence from the United States—a relationship built, from its foundations, on layers of convenience that official discourse never fully revealed.

Over the following decades, both countries wove a dense network of bilateral agreements: economic and industrial cooperation agreements (1975), fishing and maritime delimitation agreements (1976), general cooperation conventions (1978), tourism (1980) and trade (1984) cooperation agreements, and treaties on the enforcement of sentences, development cooperation, and mutual investment promotion that extended well into the twenty-first century. Many of these agreements passed without significant public debate or citizen scrutiny, but those were times when the volume of spending involved was considerably smaller and civil society pressure for transparency was still nascent.

The negative turning point came in 2004, when the government of Vicente Fox expelled Cuba's diplomatic representative and recalled its ambassador from Havana marking the greatest distance between the two governments in decades. With the arrival of Felipe Calderón in 2006 and Raúl Castro in Cuba, relations began to normalize slowly, a process that accelerated under Enrique Peña Nieto. By the time Andrés Manuel López Obrador assumed the presidency in 2018, the ground had been prepared for a profound realignment, grounded in explicit ideological affinities that his predecessors had avoided declaring openly.

It is within that context that what would unfold from 2022 onward must be understood. The bilateral relationship between Mexico and Cuba deepened considerably during this period, spanning strategic areas such as health, education, tourism, and energy. But this intensification is neither accidental nor unilateral: it responds to a convergence of needs that both governments found mutually convenient, occurring simultaneously to pave the way for broader cooperation cooperation that has been questioned precisely because of where the so-called humanitarian assistance agreements ultimately flow, given the political implications they carry in a region where at least three countries are governed by regimes that deny alternation of power and disregard fundamental freedoms.

On the Mexican side, the context is the elimination of the INAI, the body that for two decades guaranteed citizens' right to know how and on what the government spends public funds. On the Cuban side, 2022 marks the deepening of a structural crisis without precedent since the so-called Special Period of the 1990s. The island was simultaneously facing a severe energy crisis, runaway inflation, and the failure of its most recent major economic reform: the Tarea Ordenamiento Monetario (Monetary Reordering Task).

Implemented in January 2021 with the aim of unifying Cuba's monetary system, eliminating the dual-currency arrangement, and transforming household income, the Tarea Ordenamiento closed 2023 with 30% more inflation and overall economic contraction of between one and two percent. Economist Pedro Monreal was categorical: the Tarea Ordenamiento "failed spectacularly in all four of its objectives: there was no monetary or exchange rate unification, subsidies still accounted for 14.4% of total public spending in 2023, and the transformation of household incomes consisted of their collapse." The Communist Party itself ultimately acknowledged the failure officially.

Added to this internal economic debacle was the weakening of the external support that had historically sustained the regime. Venezuela, Cuba's primary energy and financial backer since the Chávez era, was experiencing its own turbulence, with oil shipments becoming more irregular and conditional. Support from Russia and China, while present, was insufficient to fill this gap. The result was a Cuba that entered 2022 with daily blackouts of twelve or more hours, chronic shortages, a massive emigration exodus, and a population pushed to the limits of its capacity to survive.

In that context, the agreements with Mexico do not represent merely a gesture of ideological solidarity: they represent real economic oxygen for a government that urgently needed it. And for the Mexican government, they represented the opportunity to deepen a political alliance aimed at maintaining regional influence, free from the constraints or oversight that an independent body capable of demanding accountability over the terms, costs, and conditions of those agreements would have imposed.

It is, ultimately, a legal framework tailored to sustain, without restrictions or scrutiny, a support relationship with a regime accused of systematic human rights violations and in which the economy is concentrated in GAESA, a conglomerate of companies owned by the Revolutionary Armed Forces, directed by Raúl Castro and a select group of generals who form a state within the state. Founded in 1995, GAESA controls at least 70% of the Cuban economy, with revenues three times higher than the state budget, and holds interests in tourism, banking, import/export, port logistics, construction, and retail trade. Unlike any private or public company subject to audit, GAESA does not allow the Cuban government itself to review its accounts, and channels its profits back to the ruling military elite. This is Mexico's real economic counterpart in Cuba: not a government accountable to its people, but a military conglomerate that has sustained a single party in power for more than six decades and that operates, like the agreements analyzed in this report, outside any institutional check.

The foregoing reveals how those who hold power in Cuba have managed to influence the decision-making structure of the Mexican government, or at least benefit from it, by manipulating information flows to remain outside any accountability.

Added to the agreements on health, education, tourism, and energy is an additional chapter that the Mexican government has presented under the label of humanitarian assistance, but which shares the same absence of transparency that characterizes all the other agreements with Cuba. Since February 2026, Mexico has accumulated more than 4,800 metric tons of aid sent to Cuba, including food, medicines, hygiene products, and solar panels. President Claudia Sheinbaum's government has defended these shipments as an act of sovereign solidarity, but the total amounts committed from public resources have not been disaggregated precisely for Mexican citizens. Moreover, the Mexican government announced a donation of nearly 35 million dollars to promote food self-sufficiency in Cuba, under the Sembrando Vida program—Mexican public resources transferred to a foreign government with no independent mechanism to verify their final destination, delivery process, or real impact. The Catholic Church and Cáritas in Cuba themselves have reported that fuel shortages prevent aid from reaching the country's interior, casting doubt on the real reach of the shipments among the most vulnerable population. And when a TV Azteca investigation revealed that products donated by Mexico were appearing for sale in Cuban state stores in hard currency, at prices of up to 43 dollars per bag of beans, the Cuban government denied the accusations without any independent Mexican body being able to investigate or refute what occurred. The elimination of the INAI makes it definitionally impossible for Mexican citizens to know with certainty whether their money reaches those who need it or instead swells the coffers of a regime accountable to no one.

What occurred next illustrates with precision the central argument of this report. In response to an information request filed by El Universal with AMEXCID, the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs revealed that the Cuban government had requested through a verbal diplomatic note that all information about the humanitarian aid shipments be classified as restricted for five years, and that Mexico had agreed. The justification the Cuban government offered reveals, in itself, the nature of the bond between both regimes: Cuban authorities argued that receipt of the aid had occasioned the emergence of "dissidents" and "antagonistic groups" opposed to Díaz-Canel's government, who spread false information "with the aim of inciting the population to organize and boycott the distribution of donations, even attempting to misappropriate them." The document warned that disclosure could provoke "social chaos, ungovernability, and the insurgency of shock groups."

The argument lacks objective grounding even on its own terms: Cuban civil society had no information about when or how the shipments arrived, does not control ports or distribution points, and operates in a context of systematic repression that makes any organized 'boycott' impossible. What the Cuban government called "dissidents" and "antagonistic groups" was, in reality, Cuban citizens demanding to know what was being received in their name. AMEXCID, under Alejandra del Moral, agreed to classify the information as restricted for five years. And when the story was published by El Universal, President Sheinbaum was categorical: "Cuba has never asked Mexico to withhold information." The official SRE document said one thing; the president said another. The contradiction was not resolved, not investigated, and generated no institutional consequence, because the body that could have investigated it no longer exists. Mexico adopted the category of "dissident"—a term from the Cuban legal-political lexicon used to criminalize dissent as a valid criterion for denying information to its own citizens. It is, perhaps, the clearest example of how Cuban sharp power operates: not through force, but through the voluntary adoption of its conceptual framework by a formally democratic state.

> *"It is not a minor detail that the opacity occurs here not in relation to the country's own projects or policies, but in response to a request by the Cuban government, which cannot be consulted because it was verbal. That means a double assumption of responsibility: that of agreeing to a request for opacity, and that of justifying it."*
>
> — HILDA LANDROVE,
> PhD in Mesoamerican Studies, UNAM.
> Rialta, April 2026

The opacity this report documents is not only institutional. It already has concrete consequences, reported by established media organizations, civil society organizations, and by the Cuban medical personnel who are part of the agreements. In the health sector, Cuban physicians deployed in Mexico have reported that the salary stipulated in the agreements is not paid to them in full: the Cuban government retains 94.4% of the amount charged for their services in Mexican territory, according to documented reporting by then-former INAI commissioner Julieta del Río in January 2024. Testimonies from physicians who participated in missions in Mexico describe the process as "a total fraud": the contracts do not specify the real salary to be received, and those who attempted to leave the mission faced reprisals against their families in Cuba.

Beyond the working conditions of the physicians, investigations by Latinus and Animal Político revealed a pattern of contract concentration in a single company linked to the Cuban state. Between 2022 and 2023, at least 111 million pesos were awarded through direct assignment, without public tendering, to Neuronic Mexicana S.A., the Mexican representative of AICA, part of the BioCubaFarma state conglomerate. A former official of the ASF declared that the then-director of Birmex explicitly instructed that this company be favored—a practice without precedent in that institution's history. Despite the evidence, no Mexican authority has opened a formal investigation.

A strategy that further complicates oversight deserves highlighting: the presence of Cuban officials and personnel is not concentrated in Mexico City, where oversight mechanisms and media density are greater, but dispersed across cooperation agreements in education, tourism, and health concluded in various states. This territorial dispersion is not a logistical detail: it is a pattern that reduces the visibility of the actors involved, fragments the available information, and makes systematic oversight considerably more difficult.

What this report documents, in sum, is not just a story of opaque agreements between two ideologically aligned governments: it is the story of how opacity has become the method, dispersion the tactic, and the elimination of institutional checks the condition that makes it all possible.

> *"It is a setback that leaves us defenseless as citizens. There will no longer be independence or impartiality in the management of public information. Now it will be the government itself that decides what is disclosed and what is not."*
>
> — JOSÉ BAUTISTA FARÍAS,
> transparency specialist, ITESO

> *"I thought I was going to earn a decent salary and be able to improve my daughters' lives. It was a total fraud. The contracts did not specify the real salary we were going to receive."*
>
> — ARISLEYDI LÓPEZ,
> Licensed in Nursing with more
> than 30 years of experience, participant
> n a Cuban medical mission in Mexico

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND CENTRAL HYPOTHESIS

A HYPOTHESIS ON DEMOCRATIC EROSION AS A GEOPOLITICAL RESOURCE

This report is grounded in a hypothesis that goes beyond the analysis of bilateral agreements: that the progressive erosion of citizen oversight mechanisms within a formally democratic state is not merely an internal problem of that state, but can become a geopolitical resource exploitable by authoritarian regimes to strengthen their regional position using resources that do not belong to them.

In the case documented here, Mexico experienced between 2018 and 2026 a sustained process of reduction of institutional checks: the elimination of the INAI, the capture of the legislative majority, and the substitution of autonomous bodies with Executive Branch agencies—aggravated by a judicial reform that generated rejection from the UN, the European Union, the United States government, and the World Bank, all of which warned about the risk to judicial independence and legal certainty. Each of these moves, presented publicly as administrative reform or austerity measures, has had the cumulative effect of reducing Mexican citizens' capacity to know, question, and demand accountability for the use of the public budget. This reduction is not neutral: it creates a space of structural opacity that, under normal conditions, would already represent a serious threat to the country's democratic health.

This democratic erosion in Mexico does not operate on a single axis but on three simultaneously: transparency (elimination of the INAI), legislative (captured majority), and judicial (reform subjecting judges to popular vote controlled by the ruling party). When all three branches of the state converge in the same direction, no internal institution retains any real capacity to restrain the arbitrary use of public resources. And it is precisely in that institutional vacuum that the agreements with Cuba operate without obstacle.

What this report documents is that that space of opacity did not remain empty. It was actively and deliberately exploited by the Cuban government—a single-party regime with more than six decades in power, accused of systematic human rights violations and with an economy concentrated in a military conglomerate to sign agreements that transfer Mexican public resources without any possible audit, without genuine legislative debate, and without citizens having effective mechanisms to demand information. The result is not merely the sum of two parallel problems, Mexican opacity plus Cuban authoritarianism—but something qualitatively distinct: a functional alliance between democratic erosion and authoritarianism, in which the former provides the space and the latter occupies it. The resources that flow through that alliance are not the resources of governments: they are the resources of Mexican citizens, spent in the name of a solidarity that was never submitted to debate, for the benefit of a regime that will never render accounts for their use, to sustain a project that is not merely national but regional: maintaining an active single-party political model in a hemisphere that has largely chosen democracy.

This regional dimension is what gives the Mexico-Cuba case its significance beyond the borders of both countries. When a democratic government uses its citizens' resources to sustain an authoritarian regime while exploiting the opacity it has itself constructed, it is not merely failing in its domestic responsibility: it is actively contributing to the deterioration of the regional democratic environment and to the normalization of a model in which concentrated, opaque, unchecked power freely decides what to do with the money of those who have no way to control it.

THE THREE PILLARS OF THE FRAMEWORK

This framework functions through the simultaneous articulation of three conditions:

Mexican structural opacity. The elimination of the INAI and its replacement by the SABG has transformed the absence of information about international agreements from an exception into a systemic condition. The problem is that a vicious cycle is created: the citizen requests information from an Executive Branch agency; if denied, they appeal to "Transparency for the People," which also depends on the Executive; if that body also denies, which it does in 99.6% of cases according to El Universal, the only recourse is an amparo lawsuit before a judiciary that, after the 2024 reform, is no longer independent. In other words: all three bodies to which a citizen can appeal are now under direct or indirect influence of the same Executive Branch they are attempting to hold accountable. It is not an imperfect system; it is a system designed to prevent information from becoming public.

> *"If transparency is a basic condition of democracy, opacity is so of autocracy, because it enables the arbitrary exercise of power that characterizes all forms of autocracy, shielding it with absolute impunity from possible public scrutiny."*
>
> — HILDA LANDROVE,
> PhD in Mesoamerican Studies, UNAM.
> Rialta, April 2026

The impact of the INAI's elimination on citizen action is not speculation. In 2025, 20% fewer information requests were filed than the previous year, totaling 796,973, when in previous years more than one million had been filed. But the most revealing figure is that citizens' review resources — citizen challenges when the government denies information, fell 60% in the first year of "Transparency for the People." The INAI handled 15,163 review resources against the Executive Branch in 2024; the new body received only 5,991 in 2025. The budget assigned to "Transparency for the People" is only 25 million pesos, equivalent to 2.33% of the INAI's 2024 budget. This is the ideal terrain for the Cuban and Mexican governments to continue signing unauditable agreements.

Legislative capture. Morena and its allies control 364 of 500 Chamber of Deputies seats (a qualified majority enabling constitutional amendments without opposition support) and 83 of 128 Senate seats. The agreements with Cuba have not been submitted to independent legislative debate or approval. In May 2025, Morena's secretary general led a delegation to Havana's Plaza de la Revolución and signed an exchange and cooperation agreement between Morena and the Communist Party of Cuba, whose terms were also never publicly disclosed. The party that controls Mexico's Congress holds a formal pact with the single party that governs Cuba.

In May 2026, Morena legislators issued a statement rejecting the U.S. Department of Justice indictment against Raúl Castro and other former Cuban officials, calling it "political coercion" and defending figures of the Cuban revolution. U.S. Under Secretary of State Christopher Landau publicly criticized the statement and noted that no legislator signed it with their own name. The episode illustrates the report's central argument: the body that should oversee the agreements with Cuba publicly defends the Cuban regime against international criminal accusations.

Judicial capture. The September 2024 judicial reform established the popular election of judges, magistrates, and Supreme Court justices, subjecting the judiciary to electoral dynamics controlled by the ruling party and eliminated judicial tenure. The UN, EU, U.S. government, and World Bank publicly warned about the risk this reform poses to judicial independence and legal certainty. What could previously be stopped through an amparo or unconstitutionality claim before an independent tribunal now faces a judiciary whose composition answers to the same political forces controlling the Executive and Legislature.

The framework is now complete: there is no citizen transparency, no legislative check, and no independent judiciary. The three mechanisms that in a functional democracy brake arbitrary use of public power have been neutralized simultaneously and deliberately.

Cuban sharp power. Following the conceptual framework developed by the National Endowment for Democracy and applied to the Cuban case by Armando Chaguaceda and GAPAC, the Havana regime has deployed for more than six decades a transnational architecture of influence that operates not through cultural attraction but through the penetration of institutions, political networks, and decision-making structures in other countries to shape narratives, neutralize criticism, and secure allies without transparency or public debate.

Unlike soft power, which seduces and attracts, sharp power pierces and manipulates. According to Chaguaceda's analysis, the Cuban regime has managed to install itself in the imaginary of broad sectors of Latin American progressive thought under the figure of "Cuban exceptionalism": the idea that Cuba is a singular case that cannot be analyzed with the same parameters applied to other regimes. The concrete mechanisms are multiple: hosting foreign academics to create organic narratives; co-opting intellectuals through exchanges; constructing closed debate circuits that exclude critical voices; pressuring media and universities to reproduce official narratives; and using allied party networks, such as the Morena-PCC agreement of May 2025 to extend influence into the state apparatus of democratic countries. Venezuela is the most extensively documented precedent; Mexico represents the most recent and advanced version of that same model.

DEMOCRATIC EROSION AS A HEMISPHERIC SECURITY THREAT

The importance of this hypothesis transcends the analysis of the Mexico-Cuba agreements. If a state's internal democratic erosion can be exploited by an external authoritarian regime to project itself regionally with others' resources, then the democratic health of each country ceases to be an exclusively domestic matter and becomes a regional security variable. A state that weakens its institutional checks does not only harm itself: it opens a door that others can walk through.

This conclusion has direct implications for the hemispheric security agenda. Regional bodies the OAS, the IACHR, and governments with interests in the hemisphere's democratic stability should not treat the institutional erosion of a member state as a purely internal affair when that erosion is being actively exploited by an authoritarian regime to project itself regionally. The Mexico-Cuba case is not a bilateral anomaly: it is a replicable model with documented precedents in Venezuela and Nicaragua that will continue expanding as long as the international community treats it as a domestic problem of each country.

CHAPTER 3

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE INAI: A STRUCTURAL SETBACK

Throughout this report, three pillars of the institutional framework that make opacity in the Mexico-Cuba agreements possible have been mentioned: legislative capture, judicial reform, and the elimination of the INAI. All three are relevant. But it is the third that deserves a specific and more detailed analysis, because it is the one that most directly and daily affects ordinary citizens.

The judicial reform and legislative capture are mechanisms that operate at the apex of the institutional system, in the courts and in Congress, and whose consequences, however serious, are perceived in a mediated and deferred way. The INAI, in contrast, was the body with which any person could interact directly: a journalist needing a contract, an academic researching public spending, a citizen wanting to know how much an agreement with Cuba cost. It was, in practical terms, the window through which transparency ceased to be an abstract principle and became an exercisable right. That is why its elimination is not only an institutional setback, it is the closing of the only door within any person's reach. Mexico was for years a Latin American reference in transparency matters.

The institutional design built over 20 years culminated in the INAI as an autonomous body, with powers to compel any Executive Branch agency to deliver information to the public, including data on major public works, contracts with third countries, and spending on federal programs.

WHAT EXACTLY DISAPPEARED?

With the constitutional reform approved in November 2024 and formalized on March 19, 2025, not only was the INAI eliminated, but the entire National Transparency System, composed of 32 state guarantor bodies and other institutions such as the Federal Audit Office (ASF) and INEGI. Its functions were transferred to the Secretariat for Anti-Corruption and Good Governance (SABG), dependent on the Federal Executive. Specifically, the following capacities were lost:

- Independent collegiate decision-making was replaced by a single-person body directly appointed by the Executive.
- The power to file unconstitutionality actions against legal frameworks that violated the right to information.
- Autonomous management of the National Transparency Platform, which centralized requests from more than 700 obligated entities at the federal level.
- The capacity to detect serious human rights violations or acts of corruption and order the opening of public-interest information.

The INAI's successor, "Transparency for the People," denies access to government data in 99.6% of cases, according to investigative journalism published in August 2025 by El Universal. Civil society organizations including Artículo 19, Fundar, EQUIS Justicia, and Quinto Elemento Lab, along with more than 80 collectives, warned that the reform blocks citizen oversight mechanisms. The IACHR also questioned the Mexican state about the lack of independence of the new model, noting that it violates inter-American standards such as the Escazú Agreement and the Inter-American Model Law 2.0.

CHAPTER 4

THE HEALTH AGREEMENT: BILLIONS WITHOUT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Cuban physicians program in Mexico is, by far, the most expensive and most opaque bilateral agreement. Between 2022 and 2026, the Mexican government contracted more than 3,600 physicians from the island to work in rural areas and high-marginalization communities through IMSS-Bienestar, the federal body charged with providing health services to the approximately 50 million Mexicans without access to social security.

According to official documents obtained by El Universal, the Cuban physicians were distributed across 24 states: Baja California, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Colima, Estado de México, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Oaxaca, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatán, Zacatecas, and Mexico City. The states with the highest concentrations were Michoacán, Veracruz, and Sinaloa coinciding with high-marginalization states and areas with significant political presence of the governing party.

The medical agreement is not limited to the presence of Cuban professionals in Mexican hospitals: it simultaneously generates multiple-directional resource flows toward Cuba. From the consolidated medication procurement for 2023–2024, contracts for 19 pharmaceutical products were awarded to Cuba in the areas of anesthesiology, pulmonology, ophthalmology, and cancer treatment, at a maximum value of 1.576 billion pesos also without competitive international bidding. The health agreement is, in this sense, a resource transfer system operating in parallel: Cuban physicians in Mexico, Cuban medications in Mexico, Mexican money in Cuba.

The opacity model does not stop at public spending. Sources with direct knowledge of the scheme have described to this investigation the use of Cuban physicians as operators of corporate social responsibility programs of international private companies. Under this scheme, private-sector companies that allocate resources to community health programs coordinate those activities with Cuban medical personnel rather than with Mexican health professionals. What this practice reveals goes beyond an administrative irregularity: it suggests a systematic abuse of power. The Mexican government not only implements the agreement with Cuba using public resources; it extends it to the international private sector, redirecting international private resources that formally fulfill corporate social responsibility obligations toward strengthening Cuba's presence in Mexico, without competitive tendering, without independent oversight, without Mexican citizens having any way to know, and excluding Mexican professionals from these employment opportunities.

This configures a three-layer opacity model. The first layer is Mexican public resources, state funds transferred to Cuba without competitive bidding, without evaluation of results, and without an independent body able to demand accountability, as a direct consequence of the INAI's elimination. The second layer is Mexican private resources, funds from Mexican entrepreneurs extracted through extralegal pressure via the so-called "Proyecto Isla del Sol," a scheme through which government officials pressured private entrepreneurs to make donations destined for Cuba under implicit threat of consequences, detailed later in this report. The third layer is international private resources, funds from foreign companies operating in Mexico, redirected toward the Cuban presence scheme through corporate social responsibility programs coordinated with Cuban physicians. In all three cases, the elimination of the INAI obstructs any information request about what is occurring.

WHAT MEXICO PAID CUBA AND NEVER EXPLAINED TO ITS CITIZENS

The contracts signed between IMSS and Cuba's Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos, S.A. amount to considerable sums:

- First agreement (July 2022): 1,377,300 euros per month for 11 months.
- Second agreement (May 2023): 1,636,308 euros per month for 3 months.
- Third agreement (July 2023): similar amounts, through December 2023.
- In 2025, IMSS-Bienestar allocated an additional 2.004 billion pesos solely in logistical expenses for food, transportation, and lodging for Cuban physicians.
- The monthly cost per physician amounts to approximately 100,000 pesos: 27,000 in salary deposited directly to a Cuban state account not to the physician—and 77,000 in support costs including lodging equipped with appliances, special meals three times a day, permanent transportation with a driver, and personalized 24-hour attention for any additional arrangements.

WHAT THE INAI COULD HAVE DEMANDED — AND CAN NO LONGER

When El Universal requested, through transparency mechanisms, information about the individual salaries of the Cuban physicians and their legal contracting arrangement, IMSS responded that it did not have that information. Neither IMSS, nor IMSS-Bienestar, nor the Secretariat of Health have performance metrics for these professionals. The Cuban state retains, according to international organizations, between 75% and 95% of the salary of physicians sent abroad. Medical missions generate between 6 and 11 billion dollars annually for Havana, surpassing revenues from tourism and remittances. Mexico is the program's largest payer in Latin America.

THE OPPORTUNITY COST: WHAT MEXICO COULD HAVE BUILT

To understand the real magnitude of the spending on Cuban physicians, it must be situated in the context of the Mexican health system and its structural needs. According to a 2023 Secretariat of Health report, Mexico needs 200,000 general practitioners and specialists to offer adequate services to the population without social security. The country has only 135,046 certified specialist physicians, 107 per 100,000 inhabitants, when the international recommendation is at least 230 per 100,000.

Facing that structural and documented deficit, the Mexican government chose to contract Cuban physicians. With the 24 million dollars spent between 2022 and 2023, according to calculations published in The Lancet, it would have been possible to pay the annual salary of 3,500 Mexican specialist physicians or 4,500 general practitioners. A family physician at IMSS was receiving no more than 12,000 pesos per month, while the Cuban physician received at least 53,569 pesos plus expenses.

It bears noting that Cuban physicians in practice receive only between 5% and 25% of that contractual amount, as the Cuban state retains between 75% and 95% of the agreed salary. What the agreement establishes as remuneration for the health professional is, in fact, a direct transfer to the Cuban government disguised as a salary.

In three years, 50,000 medicine graduates obtained their degrees in Mexico, against 2,000 available positions, leaving nearly 40,000 unemployed, many working in pharmacies earning less than 100 pesos per hour. There were 51,000 unemployed Mexican physicians while the government contracted Cuban physicians, citing a shortage of personnel. The problem was not a shortage of Mexican physicians: it was a shortage of political will to create decent working conditions for them.

In 2024, UNAM received 25,088 admission applications for medicine and offered only 326 places, 1.29% of applicants. There are tens of thousands of young Mexicans who want to become physicians and cannot access the spots. There are tens of thousands of trained Mexican physicians who cannot find work. And there are more than 3,000 Cuban physicians in Mexico, whose salaries for the most part end up in the coffers of the regime that sent them.

TERRITORIAL DISTRIBUTION AS A TACTIC OF INVISIBILIZATION

A frequently overlooked element in the analysis of the health agreement is its geographic dimension. The Cuban physicians were distributed across 24 states, with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 40 specialists per state. The states with the highest concentration were Guerrero and Veracruz, with 449 specialists, while Yucatán received the fewest with only 18.

The geographic distribution reveals a political pattern that cannot be ignored: all the states where Cuban physicians were deployed in the last documented contract are governed by Morena, the ruling party. They are not necessarily the states with the greatest medical deficit, they are the states politically aligned with the federal government that signed the agreement.

There are multiple specific complaints about the conditions under which physicians operate in those territories. According to TV Azteca reports, a Cuban physician in Guerrero was living in conditions of great precariousness, a situation described by Dr. Marlene Azor Hernández. The transparency of the agreement has been completely lost since May 2022: it is no longer possible to know the exact location of each physician, the real amount they individually receive, or whether there is a monthly stipend for them, given that full payment for their services is made directly to a Cuban state company.

Azor Hernández specified that Cuban physicians receive only 25% of the money paid for their services when they return to Cuba from the mission, that their passports are confiscated, they are prohibited from interacting with the community where they work, from establishing romantic relationships with anyone outside the mission, and from leaving the authorized zone after six in the evening. “It is a form of control and confinement that violates all the civil and labor rights of these workers,” the academic emphasized.

Azor Hernández has systematically denounced in international media that Cuban medical missions are classified by international human rights organizations as forced labor, modern slavery, and trafficking in persons—a characterization the Mexican government has deliberately ignored in renewing and expanding the agreements year after year.

Legislators from the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) also reported that Cuban physicians were practicing without a valid professional license in Mexico a legally indispensable requirement for any foreign health professional operating in Mexican territory.

The dispersion across 24 states is not only a logistical decision: it is the same fragmentation tactic this report has documented in other areas. When contracts are distributed among different state agencies and providers multiply by region, oversight requires tracing dozens of contracts across different jurisdictions simultaneously. The result is that no external observer can have a complete picture of the scheme and without the INAI, they cannot demand one either.

THE ABSENCE OF EVALUATION: PAYING WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT YOU GET

Perhaps the most revealing piece of data in the entire health section is also the simplest: neither the Secretariat of Health, nor IMSS, nor IMSS-Bienestar have metrics, indicators, or reports evaluating the performance of Cuban physicians from 2022 to date. Mexico spent more than 2.5 billion pesos on Cuban medical services and does not know whether those physicians attended patients, how many, what clinical results they produced, or whether their presence had any measurable impact on the communities to which they were assigned. Not a single impact evaluation report exists. With the INAI, any journalist, academic, or citizen could request that data and obtain a binding response. Without the INAI, the government decides what it evaluates and what it does not. And in the case of the health agreement with Cuba, the answer has been consistent: nothing.

THE MEDICAL ASSOCIATIONS: THE VOICE THE GOVERNMENT IGNORED

From the first announcement of Cuban physician contracting in 2022, Mexico's medical associations raised their voices systematically. NGOs Prisoners Defenders, Outreach Aid to the Americas, and the International Foundation for Freedom, together with academics including Dr. Azor Hernández, denounced in Mexico City that Cuban physicians in state missions work under conditions of modern slavery, precisely amid the controversy over contracting 500 Cuban physicians, a decision criticized by the opposition and national medical associations. Opposition senators noted there were 51,000 unemployed Mexican physicians while the government contracted Cuban ones. The government did not respond to any of these observations with data. On the contrary, it responded with more contracts.

CHAPTER 5

THE EDUCATIONAL AND SPORTS AGREEMENT: FROM ACADEMIC EXCHANGE TO DOCUMENTED CORRUPTION

THE BUDGETARY CONTEXT

The 2026 Federal Expenditure Budget allocates 1.13 trillion pesos to the education sector, equivalent to 2.92% of GDP. However, per capita education spending is 8,417 pesos per inhabitant, 11% less than in 2015, when it was 9,458 pesos. A decade later, the Mexican government spends less in real terms to educate each of its citizens. Of the total education budget, 36.3%, or 195.1 billion pesos, is allocated to welfare scholarships, while infrastructure, teacher training, and technology remain behind.

THE EDUCATIONAL AGREEMENT: 13 AGREEMENTS WITHOUT FIGURES OR EVALUATION

In February 2024, Cuba's Ministry of Higher Education and Mexico's SEP formalized a framework educational cooperation agreement, signed by Francisco Luciano Concheiro Bórquez and Cuba's Minister of Higher Education Walter Baluja García. Under this framework, 13 collaboration agreements were signed between educational institutions of both countries, none of which has been publicly listed, and none of which has publicly available information about the specific commitments or resources involved.

A revealing piece of data about the opacity: despite Concheiro Bórquez publicly announcing the 13 agreements, no Mexican agency has published the list of signatory institutions, the specific commitments, or the resources committed. Mexico sent 85 representatives including rectors and university directors, but Mexican citizens cannot know which public institutions committed resources on the country's behalf. It is, once again, the same pattern: agreements publicly announced, details nonexistent in the public space.

The agreement was signed by Concheiro Bórquez, who was also one of the architects of the SEP's new free textbooks, materials widely questioned for their ideological orientation. It is not a minor detail that the official in charge of the educational relationship with Cuba was a declared member of the Mexican Communist Party since 1967 and of Morena from its inception. This is not an ideological criticism: it is context that helps explain why these agreements are signed with the fluency with which they are signed, and why questions about their content, costs, and conditions never find answers in the public space.

THE CONADE-INDER CASE: WHEN OPACITY LEADS TO CORRUPTION

The Federal Audit Office (ASF) revealed that in 2019, CONADE simulated the contract of 29 Cuban coaches from Cuba's INDER, supposedly charged with training Mexican athletes. There are no immigration records confirming their arrival in Mexico, nor documentary evidence that they performed the activities for which they were paid.

The agreement with INDER was signed by the Deputy Director of Sports Quality, without legal authority to do so, without the approval of the Secretariat of Foreign Affairs or required procedural opinions, and with a 120.5% increase over the originally agreed amount. The investigation exposed that the Cuban Embassy in Mexico received more than 900,000 dollars for services that were never performed.

CONADE's director, Ana Gabriela Guevara, accumulated 44 detected irregularities and an amount pending clarification of more than 626 million pesos. As of the closing date of this report, no Mexican or Cuban official has been criminally sanctioned. Guevara left the CONADE directorship in September 2024 without criminal proceedings, and the case has disappeared from public debate. No legislator has reopened the file, no media outlet has systematically followed up on the irregularities documented by the ASF, and the Attorney General's Office has not issued any public statement. The CONADE-INDER case is the clearest example of how impunity operates as a necessary complement to opacity: there is no need to hide what no one is pursuing.

CHAPTER 6

THE TOURISM AGREEMENT: COOPERATION WITHOUT FIGURES AND LODGING AS A PARALLEL BUSINESS

THE BUDGETARY CONTEXT

The 2026 Federal Expenditure Budget reduced tourism spending by 24 million pesos less than the previous year, a real decline of 2.1%. Mexico cuts the budget of its own tourism sector while signing four-year tourism cooperation programs with Cuba, without the resources committed in these programs having been publicly disclosed.

THE TOURISM COOPERATION PROGRAM 2025–2028

On July 1, 2025, Mexico's Secretary of Tourism Josefina Rodríguez and Cuba's tourism minister Juan Carlos García signed the Tourism Cooperation Action Program 2025–2028, providing for joint routes, hotel management training, tourism guide training, digital marketing, and exchange of experiences in digital promotion. During his visit to Mexico, the Cuban minister acknowledged to tour operators that his government hopes Mexico will again become one of the main sources of tourists to Cuba. Mexico signs this cooperation program precisely when major international hotel chains, Meliá, Iberostar, and Blue Diamond—have abandoned Cuba due to the risks of its state and military-based economic model.

In May 2024, an additional Social Tourism agreement established "mission-driven" trips between both countries, with the declared objective of generating, according to the document itself, "a better Mexican, a better new man," a formulation that literally reproduces the Cuban revolutionary rhetoric of the “new man” in an official Mexican government document. The agreement operates through a Mexican private company called Turismo Social, which signed an agreement with AMISTUR, the tourism reception agency of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with Peoples (ICAP), a Cuban body with extensive documentation of its role in influence activities and ideological monitoring. Programs include guided visits to Cuban polyclinics, exchanges with Ministry of Health officials about medical missions, and visits to Cuban state institutions. The result is a scheme of ideological tourism using a private company as an intermediary for the Cuban state to have direct access to Mexican citizens within an official narrative framework with no counterweight.

THE LODGING OF CUBAN PHYSICIANS: WHEN HEALTH BECOMES A TOURISM BUSINESS

Government contracts established that companies Pigudi Gastronómico, Comercializadora de la Península del Mayab, and BC CAP Development were to provide Cuban physicians with appliance-equipped lodging, special diets, permanent transportation with a driver, and personalized 24-hour attention. The agreed cost per night ranged between 1,550 and 2,100 Mexican pesos, between 90 and 120 dollars, depending on the zone. However, what the contracts established did not necessarily correspond to what physicians received in practice.

In Guerrero, Pigudi Gastronómico’s proposal was rejected, leaving some Cuban physicians without access to transportation. A Cuban physician, whose identity was withheld, commented that fortunately he lived near the hospital, while Dr. Azor Hernández reported that another Cuban colleague in that state was living in conditions of great precariousness. The IACHR, which in 2025 collected testimonies from 71 members of Cuban medical personnel in 10 countries, documented that physicians had little information about their contracts and payment structures, leaving them in precarious economic conditions despite the large sums paid by host countries.

The result is a double gap: the Mexican government paid millions of pesos for lodging and logistics services that in several cases were not provided as contracted, while the Cuban physicians reported conditions of abandonment that directly contradict what was stipulated. The money flowed; the conditions did not arrive; and no independent body had the capacity to verify either.

The Mexican government disbursed 2.004 billion pesos, approximately 112 million dollars, to cover food, lodging, and transportation for Cuban physicians during 2025. The lodging cost per night ranged between 1,550 and 2,100 pesos (90–120 dollars) depending on the zone, distributed across 23 states.

Salary payments are controlled by Neuronic Mexicana, subsidiary of Neuronic S.A. Cuba, the same company that concentrated medication contracts without competitive bidding. Neither the Secretariat of Health, nor IMSS, nor IMSS-Bienestar have metrics, indicators, or reports evaluating the performance of Cuban physicians from 2022 to date.

CHAPTER 7

THE ENERGY AGREEMENT: SUSTAINING A REGIME AND THE COST TO MEXICO

THE BUDGETARY CONTEXT: PEMEX AT ITS LIMITS

The 2026 Energy Secretariat budget increased 93.3% compared to the previous year, but this contrasts with Pemex's financial reality: record debt, sustained production decline, and speculative credit rating. Hydrocarbon liquid production fell in 2023 to 1.57 million barrels per day, from 1.8 million in 2018. It is in this context that Mexico decided to become Cuba's principal energy supplier.

FROM VENEZUELA TO MEXICO: THE RELAY OF ENERGY SUPPORT

Cuba's energy crisis in 2023 required Mexico's petroleum assistance. Without the hydrocarbons normally sent by Venezuela and more sporadically by Russia proving sufficient, the Cuban regime asked López Obrador for help. In 2023, shipments totaled approximately 400 million dollars. In 2024, the volume rose to 20,100 barrels per day of crude and 2,700 of fuels, with an approximate value of 600 million dollars. In 2025, Mexico sold Cuba oil worth 496 million dollars. In total, between 2023 and 2025, Mexico transferred to Cuba energy resources worth more than 1.5 billion dollars. To channel these shipments, the Mexican government created Gasolinas del Bienestar S.A. de C.V., a state company designed essentially to channel crude and derivatives to Cuba.

Gasolinas Bienestar was born in 2022 as a private company, although it is a direct Pemex subsidiary. This legal status allows it to operate under commercial secrecy, avoiding Federal Audit Office scrutiny. For energy specialist Gonzalo Monroy: "At the moment López Obrador created Gasolinas Bienestar, he managed to circumvent any other type of oversight." Meanwhile, Mexico's oil exports to the United States—a solvent and transparent market—fell by nearly 40% in two years. Mexico reconfigured its energy map without explaining it publicly. The company's design responds to two documented objectives: avoiding that persons or entities appear on the U.S. OFAC sanctions list, and evading independent audit bodies.

THE OIL ARRIVES; THE LIGHTS DO NOT

The most uncomfortable question of the energy agreement is the one no one in the Mexican government has answered: if Mexico sent oil to Cuba worth more than 1.5 billion dollars over three years, why did blackouts on the island not only fail to decrease but worsened to unprecedented levels?

In June 2026, Havana records blackouts exceeding 22 hours per day, and across the rest of the country cuts of up to two consecutive days are reported. 62% of Cuban territory remains without electricity during peak demand hours. The UN warned in April 2026 that Cuba's energy crisis has a "systemic and growing" impact on health, water, food, and education, with more than 96,000 surgeries postponed. The Cuban electrical system generates only 43% of the energy it needs, with a deficit of 1,690 MW at peak hours.

The blackouts have unleashed street protests, pot-banging demonstrations, burning of garbage in public streets, and road closures almost every night in numerous Cuban territories. A Cuban citizen summarized the frustration in a viral video: "Here they don't even give you explanations anymore... fifty, eighty, however many hours without power... and you don't complain."

The most documented response about the destination of Mexico's oil points to GAESA: the Cuban regime sometimes sells part of the oil it receives at market prices, converting Mexico's transfer into hard currency for the military conglomerate that controls the economy. Mexico's oil did not reach Cuba's thermoelectric plants; it reached the regime's coffers. And Mexico, without the INAI and without legislative debate, was never able to demand an explanation for what its money was used for.

THE DISCRETIONARY BRAKE: WHEN GEOPOLITICS OVERRIDES ACCOUNTABILITY

In January 2026, the vessel Ocean Mariner docked in Havana with 85,000 barrels of crude, the last successful shipment. Its replacement was quietly canceled and disappeared from Pemex's logistics calendar. When Republican members of Congress threatened to review the USMCA if Mexico continued supplying Cuba, Mexico chose to suspend the shipments without any formal announcement. Mexico made the decision to commit more than 1.5 billion dollars without any legislative debate, and suspended them the same way: silently, without rendering accounts to Congress or to citizens. The precedent was established: Bancomext's Board had previously forgiven a Cuban debt of more than 480 million dollars. Discretionary handling of public resources destined for Cuba is not new: it is a pattern.

What makes this pattern even more revealing is that it is not exclusive to the Cuban side. In Mexico, the Tren Maya, López Obrador's flagship project, operates under a notably similar opacity structure to GAESA. On April 13, 2022, Tren Maya S.A. de C.V. was created, with 99% of shares held by Sedena, making it impossible for citizens to know how public resources are used. The project was transferred to Sedena under the legal figure of "national security," removing it from Federal Audit Office scrutiny. An opposition legislator summarized: "There is total secrecy about the spending, environmental impact, projects, progress, everything from the conception, the permits that were never obtained, the damage to the jungle. Three years of opacity." **That the agreements between both countries operate under this double layer of military opacity is not a coincidence, it is the condition that makes them possible.**

CHAPTER 8

HUMAN RIGHTS: WHEN THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK BECOMES COMPLICIT IN MODERN SLAVERY

A COMPLAINT BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

What this report has documented until now as opacity, arbitrariness, and absence of checks acquires in this section its most serious dimension: that of a systematic human rights violation in which the Mexican government is not merely a passive witness but an active accomplice, according to documentation presented before international bodies.

The organization Cuban Prisoners Defenders (CPD) filed a formal accusation before the United Nations and the International Criminal Court against the governments of Mexico, Italy, and Qatar for practices of trafficking in persons, slavery, persecution, and other inhumane acts against Cuban physicians. The UN Special Rapporteurs studied and analyzed all testimonies and evidence, interviewed many of the victims, and drafted an accusatory letter to Cuba. The European Parliament condemned the slavery of the missions in its resolution of September 16, 2021, stating that "the Cuban state continues to systematically violate the labor and human rights of its healthcare personnel deployed to work abroad in medical missions, making them equivalent to a contemporary form of slavery according to the United Nations."

THE DOCUMENTED CONDITIONS

Prisoners Defenders submitted to the United Nations a report with 1,111 testimonies from Cuban professionals who are victims of slavery and forced labor. Among the documented violations: the majority do not participate voluntarily; the Cuban regime confiscates their passports; and they receive only 20% of their salaries. The report on Mexico yielded alarming results: all Cuban physicians entered the country on military aircraft without going through immigration services, entering through military airports. According to Prisoners Defenders, soldiers arrive in Mexico under the guise of health personnel.

The so-called "8-year law" prohibits professionals from returning to Cuba for that period if they do not return upon completing their work, classifying them as "deserters" and "undesirables." Cuba's new Penal Code worsened their situation: it is no longer enough to wait eight years, they will also be prosecuted upon return. Physicians in Mexico are not merely exploited workers: they are persons under permanent surveillance, with their families in Cuba as guarantees of obedience.

> *"When you work in a Cuban medical mission, you are not a person. You have no rights."*
>
> — Testimony of a Cuban physician on mission in Mexico, collected by investigative media

THE DAMAGE TO MEXICAN PHYSICIANS

The human rights analysis cannot be limited to the Cuban victims. The scheme also generates documented harm against Mexico's own health professionals. Between 2022 and 2023, the Mexican government spent 24 million dollars on contracting Cuban physicians, a sum that, according to an article in The Lancet, could have covered the annual salaries of approximately 3,500 Mexican specialists or 4,500 general practitioners.

At the time of the complaints, there were 51,000 unemployed Mexican physicians, while the government contracted Cuban physicians citing a shortage of personnel. The contradiction is structural: there was no shortage of Mexican physicians, but a shortage of political will to offer them adequate working conditions. The total monthly cost per Cuban physician, including salary, lodging, meals, and transportation, amounted to approximately 144,000 pesos per month, compared to the significantly lower salaries of Mexican physicians in rural areas. This perceived inequality generated friction and deterioration of the working environment in hospitals where both coexisted.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLICITY AS A LEGAL CATEGORY

By signing agreements with a Cuban state company internationally accused of trafficking in persons, by allowing Cuban personnel to enter through military airports outside immigration controls, by refusing to provide information about salaries and working conditions, and by continuing the agreements after international organizations publicly documented the scheme, the Mexican government cannot invoke ignorance. The U.S. Department of State has repeatedly reflected in its Trafficking in Persons reports the complaints about Cuban physicians, noting that host countries are also marked as perpetrators. Mexico appears on that list.

THE IACHR REPORT: WHEN COMPLAINTS BECOME A TECHNICAL DOCUMENT

In April 2026, the IACHR published an almost 200-page report systematizing for the first time, with institutional voice, the violations documented in Cuban medical missions. Based on 71 direct interviews with professionals who participated in 109 missions in countries including Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico, it identifies circumstances of forced labor that could lead to situations of trafficking in persons. IACHR commissioner Edgar Stuardo Ralón Orellana noted that with this report, complaints made for years by victims and civil society organizations “cease to be a narrative and become, with institutional voice, a technical document with data, with testimonies, with citations, with sources.”

The Objections of the Mexican Government and Their Response

The Mexican government's position was publicly expressed by Alejandro Encinas, Mexico's OAS representative, at the document's presentation in April 2026. His objections: first, that findings cannot be generalized because the report is based on only 71 testimonies "out of thousands that exist"; second, that the Mexican experience "is not valued in this report" and differs substantially from Venezuela's documented cases; third, that cooperation with Cuba is a "sovereign and solidary policy" that cannot be questioned without contravening international law.

Each argument deserves a direct response. The IACHR used standard qualitative methodology: not statistical representativeness but documenting patterns of conduct through testimonies. The 71 testimonies correspond to missions in 109 countries, which considerably broadens its scope. Mexico's objection would be equivalent to arguing that a report on torture is invalid if it does not interview all victims. Moreover, 83% of testimonies collected in Latin America come from Venezuela, reflecting the concentration of missions there, not a deliberate exclusion of Mexico. The IACHR did, in fact, interview professionals who served in Mexico.

The structural elements of the mission, salary retention, passport confiscation, Cuban-law penalties for abandonment, are identical across all recipient countries. What differs between Venezuela and Mexico is not the exploitation structure: it is the level of opacity of the recipient country. And on that score, Mexico does not fare well.

The sovereignty argument is the most revealing. Invoking non-intervention to reject a human rights report is precisely the mechanism Cuba's sharp power has installed in Mexico's official discourse: sovereignty as a shield against international scrutiny. The IACHR's special rapporteur was explicit: documented abuses tend to worsen in countries where institutional guarantees are weaker. A country that has eliminated its transparency body, classifies information at Cuba's request, and denies access to contract data with Cuba fits that description precisely. Sovereignty cannot protect a system that UN bodies have characterized as modern slavery.

Two of the IACHR's seven rapporteurs submitted partially dissenting votes, noting that testimonies are overwhelmingly related to missions in Venezuela and that broader conclusions should not be drawn. This internal dissent reinforces the report's credibility as a product of genuine methodological debate. And for Mexico specifically, the contractual data and testimonies documented in this report independently sustain the same conclusions.

THE FINANCIAL STRUCTURE OF NON-COMPLIANCE

In 2022, Cuba's Empresa de Comercialización de Servicios Médicos collected 4.882 billion dollars from medical services exports, equivalent to 69% of Cuba's total exported services that year. But that money did not go to the physicians. The report documents salary retentions of between 60% and 90% depending on the mission, and civil society organizations cited by the IACHR indicate that in some agreements physicians receive only between 2.5% and 25% of what the recipient country pays for their services.

In Mexico's case, the agreement established specific amounts for salary, lodging, meals, and transportation as separate items. However, Cuban physicians never received those amounts directly: the Cuban state intercepted and retained most of them, delivering to the physician only a fraction which in many cases had to cover the very lodging and meal costs the agreement supposedly already contemplated as separate expenses. The agreement was, in practice, breached in all its clauses from the moment the money left Mexico for Cuban coffers.

> *"50 dollars a month was my salary. When I was in Cuba I thought it was a lot, but upon arriving I learned it was less than a quarter of what a stretcher-bearer earned in the same hospital. I understood it was the greatest exploitation there could be."*

> *"A patient secretly brought us horse meat because we needed to eat, and we ate it."*

THE CONTROL SYSTEM: LIFE UNDER PERMANENT SURVEILLANCE

Testimonies collected by the IACHR describe a system of total control that includes: curfew from 6 p.m.; mandatory location reporting to the mission head; passport confiscation upon arrival; prohibition on interacting with nationals, including romantic relationships requiring approval by a mission "legal" official; and cross-surveillance among colleagues who are required to report any suspicious conduct under threat of collective sanction.

> *"I lost my relationship with that woman. They punish you by not letting you have friendships and by making you lose the bonds you had already formed. I had to go hungry and it was very hard."*

Added to this surveillance system is a practice documented in first-hand testimonies: the vacations promised in the agreements were never granted. Physicians worked continuously throughout their entire mission without rest periods and without the possibility of returning to Cuba within stipulated times. For many, the only moment they could return to the island was at the mission's end, and it was precisely that return they used to not go back, escaping a scheme that had not honored any of the conditions it had agreed to.

Added to salary retentions and suppression of vacations is another documented practice: every time a Cuban patriotic date approached, January 1, July 26, October 10, the mission head demanded a "voluntary contribution" from physicians to cover food and beverages for the celebration. This contribution was deducted from the already meager salary they received.

Testimonies collected by Yusimí Rodríguez López for Diario de Cuba in May 2026, obtained from Cuban health workers who escaped from missions in Venezuela and arrived in Mexico, confirm and expand the IACHR's documented pattern. Armando, a fictitious name to protect his identity, describes how patient attendance statistics were systematically inflated: "According to the number of patients attended, that was the amount of oil, of barrels, that entered Cuba. I had to create medical records for phantom patients. The patients did not exist and hospitalizations and discharges were reported as hospital activity." The nurse Valeria corroborates: "Physicians would see ten patients and were obligated to report 30 or 40 to boost statistics." Nurse Maribel adds: "I had to vaccinate the population against Covid-19 with the expired Cuban vaccine Abdala, even though I had taken a Hippocratic oath to save lives."

The deception was not limited to medical statistics. Collaborators also had to engage in political proselytism disguised as preventive medicine: “We had to go to people’s homes, dressed as physicians, to give talks in favor of the Chavista government,” says the doctor Gustavo. Instructions came from the mission head and were carried out under explicit threat: whoever refused risked being returned to Cuba with the mission revoked, without right to remuneration, and with the revocation of their medical license. Valeria summarizes: “They kept me locked in the CDI working for five consecutive days. I understood we were slaves of a regime.”

These health workers arrived in Mexico after escaping from Venezuela through Colombia. Their presence in Mexican territory as asylum seekers or in the process of immigration regularization makes Mexico not only the country that financed the scheme, but the territory where its victims seek protection. The paradox is structural: the same state that paid for their services through opaque agreements is now the one that must decide whether to grant them international protection.

An element that Rodríguez López highlights and that speaks for itself about the nature of the scheme is the level of fear with which the testimonies were obtained. All identities were protected to prevent regime reprisals against family members in Cuba. Some sources who initially agreed to testify retracted before publication. The reason was not only fear of consequences in Cuba, it was also fear of consequences in Mexico. Physicians and nurses in the process of asylum applications or immigration regularization in Mexico fear that making their situation public could negatively affect their immigration status, expose them to institutional pressure, or to the Cuban apparatus, which operates in Mexico with the passive complicity of a state that has not investigated the scheme or protected its victims. The silence of these witnesses is not voluntary: it is the direct consequence of a system that pursues those who flee even in the country to which they flee.

It should be noted that we have identified a pattern of falsifying results not exclusive to missions in Venezuela. A source with direct knowledge of the corporate social responsibility scheme in Mexico, who requested identity protection for the same reasons as the physicians interviewed by Rodríguez López, described to this investigation an identical practice: when Cuban physicians operate as executors of international companies' social responsibility programs in Mexico, the statistics of services provided are equally inflated: "If those Cuban physicians perform ten mammograms, they report one hundred." The company formally fulfills its social responsibility obligations, the Cuban physician reports the number they are told, and the regime receives payment for one hundred procedures that never occurred. Nobody verifies. Because the body that could have demanded it, the INAI, no longer exists.

ABANDONING THE MISSION: PENALIZED DESERTION

Abandoning the mission is classified as desertion. According to commissioner Ralón, the consequences can be economic, loss of all retained remuneration, and criminal: prison terms of three to eight years if they return to Cuba ahead of time, or a prohibition from entering the country for at least eight years if they remain at their destination, being treated as "deserters or traitors to the homeland." The IACHR documents that several testimonies coincide in an actual impossibility of freely terminating the mission: neither staying nor leaving are available options without serious consequences.

MEXICO'S RESPONSIBILITY AS A RECIPIENT COUNTRY

One of the central axes of the IACHR report points directly at the contracting countries. Responsibility does not rest solely with Havana: every state that contracts Cuban missions is obligated to guarantee that human rights are respected on its territory. By signing agreements with Cuba's Empresa de Comercialización de Servicios Médicos Cubanos, by allowing the entry of personnel through military airports without immigration controls, by refusing to provide information about salaries and working conditions, and by continuing the contracts after this report was published in April 2026, the Mexican government cannot invoke ignorance. The IACHR has been explicit: host countries are co-responsible. Mexico appears on that list, not as a victim of opacity, but as one of its architects.

THE USMCA RISK: WHEN COMPLICITY HAS COMMERCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The human rights dimension of the Mexico-Cuba agreements is not merely a matter of moral or international legal responsibility. It also has a concrete commercial implication that the Mexican government has consistently avoided acknowledging publicly: the risk of non-compliance with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA/T-MEC).

Chapter 23 of the USMCA, dedicated to labor matters, obligates all three signatory parties to adopt and maintain in their legislation the prohibition of forced or compulsory labor, in accordance with ILO commitments. Article 23.6 goes further: it establishes an explicit commitment to discourage the importation of goods and services produced through forced labor, even when that forced labor results from trafficking in persons. These provisions are complemented by oversight and dispute resolution mechanisms allowing trade sanctions for systematic non-compliance.

The connection to the Mexico-Cuba agreements is not speculative. The IACHR, UN Special Rapporteurs, and Prisoners Defenders have documented that the Cuban medical mission structure constitutes forced labor and trafficking in persons under applicable international standards. Mexico contracts those services, pays for them with public resources, allows Cuban personnel to enter the country outside ordinary immigration controls, and has continued the agreements after international organizations publicly documented the scheme. The U.S. Department of State has repeatedly identified Mexico as a co-responsible country in its annual Trafficking in Persons Reports.

When Republican legislators threatened to review the USMCA over Cuba oil transfers, Mexico quietly suspended them. Commercial pressure worked where diplomacy had not. The same mechanism could activate over the medical missions: if a USMCA trade partner initiated a review panel under Chapter 23 arguing that Mexico imports services produced through forced labor, the country would find itself legally vulnerable, unable to invoke sovereignty or methodological differences as a defense, because the applicable standard would not be that of the IACHR but of the treaty Mexico itself signed and ratified.

The elimination of the INAI aggravates this risk: without an independent body able to certify the working conditions of Cuban physicians on Mexican territory, Mexico has no means of demonstrating USMCA compliance to any trade panel. The opacity constructed to shield domestic scrutiny becomes, in the commercial arena, a structural vulnerability vis-à-vis its northern partners.

CHAPTER 9

GAESA: MEXICO'S REAL COUNTERPART IN CUBA

A STATE WITHIN THE STATE

To understand who concretely benefits from the agreements between Mexico and Cuba, it is necessary to understand who really controls the Cuban economy. It is not the government. It is not the state. It is GAESA. The Grupo de Administración Empresarial S.A. was founded by Raúl Castro in 1995 to provide the Cuban Armed Forces with a financial base during the Special Period following the Soviet collapse. What began as a limited network of military companies became, under General Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Calleja, Raúl Castro's son-in-law, the largest economic conglomerate on the island. GAESA controls at least 70% of the Cuban economy, with revenues more than three times higher than the state budget, and interests in tourism, financial investment, import/export, remittances, hotels, construction, port logistics, fishing, financial services, and retail trade.

Its crown jewel is Gaviota S.A.: 121 hotels, 20 marinas, the airline Aerogaviota, the rental company Transgaviota, the agency Gaviota Tours, and the supplier AT Comercial. In the first quarter of 2024, Gaviota accounted for 72% of GAESA's total revenues, with a net profit margin of 42%, nearly four times the global hotel sector average. The pattern of fusion between GAESA and the Cuban state is complete: Manuel Marrero Cruz, former president of Gaviota and former Minister of Tourism, currently holds the position of Prime Minister of Cuba.

The man who directed the military conglomerate's tourism arm now directs the government.

A STATE THAT DOES NOT AUDIT THE STATE

GAESA has no website, no known institutional email, and no official contact channels. It does not publish financial statements and does not appear in the state budget. Neither the National Assembly of People's Power nor the Comptroller General of the Republic can audit its accounts, despite it pocketing virtually every dollar from the regime's most profitable businesses: tourism, remittances, foreign trade, and medical missions abroad.

The level of secrecy has internal political consequences. In July 2024, Cuba's Comptroller General Gladys Bejerano was removed after 14 years in the position, following her apparent inadvertent admission to the EFE agency that the state had no jurisdiction to audit GAESA. Three years earlier, in 2021, the then-Minister of the Armed Forces Leopoldo Cintra Frías was relieved shortly after reportedly seeking to push an internal investigation into the holding. The message is clear: in Cuba, whoever tries to oversee GAESA loses their position.

WHAT MEXICO TRANSFERS TO GAESA

When the Mexican government pays Cuba's Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos Cubanos S.A., sends oil, or signs tourist and educational agreements with Cuban ministries, it is not cooperating with an accountable government: it is transferring resources to a system where GAESA determines what is done with them. The U.S. Department of State accused GAESA of managing illicit assets, revealed that its revenues exceed Cuba's state budget by more than three times, and formally sanctioned it in May 2026.

A joint investigation by La Prensa de Panamá, elTOQUE, Martí Noticias, and Armando.Info documented at least 25 flights to Panama between 2024 and 2025 by Rodríguez López-Calleja's successor, in private jets including a Dassault Falcon 900EX whose registration was changed from Venezuela to San Marino, a microstate without an airport that rents its aeronautical registry to complicate international tracing.

This is the real counterpart of the Mexico-Cuba agreements: not a health ministry that attends to its population, not an educational system that trains its students, but an opaque military conglomerate that accumulates international assets while the island's population suffers twenty-hour blackouts, and uses the resources transferred by Mexico to sustain the power of an elite of fewer than fifteen people who have been governing for decades without accountability.

CHAPTER 10

PRESSURE ON THE MEXICAN PRIVATE SECTOR: WHEN THE STATE COERCES IN THE NAME OF SOLIDARITY

The agreements between Mexico and Cuba do not only affect citizens as taxpayers or users of public services. There is a less visible but equally serious dimension: the pressure exerted by the Mexican government on the private business sector to contribute financially to the commitments the state assumed with Cuba, without any legal framework backing that demand and with the implicit threat of the governmental apparatus as an instrument of coercion.

Mexican entrepreneurs publicly denounced government pressure to finance the purchase of food in Mexican supermarket chains to be sent to Cuba. According to journalist Carlos Loret de Mola, the scheme operated through letters followed by telephone calls with precise instructions: “I expect your deposit on such a date, at such a time.” As an “alternative,” they were offered the option of depositing directly to a supermarket chain to channel humanitarian aid. One entrepreneur’s description was direct: “It’s a disguised extortion: you donate money for Cuba, or you know what the consequence is.”

The scheme was internally dubbed the “Proyecto Isla del Sol” (Island of the Sun Project) and was denounced by entrepreneurs who raised potential legal risks and questioned the mechanism’s legality. AMEXCID participated in it, whose formal mandate is to manage the state’s international cooperation, not to collect private contributions under pressure for the Executive's political commitments.

When the state pressures a private entrepreneur to donate money to a government political project under the implicit threat of unspecified consequences, it is using the power of the governmental apparatus, which includes control over tax audits, permits, contracts, and regulations, as an instrument of coercion. It is exactly the same deterrence mechanism this report has documented in the sphere of citizen transparency: it is not necessary to openly sanction those who do not cooperate; it is sufficient for the threat to be sufficiently clear for cooperation to occur.

The paradox is that the Mexican government, which signed agreements with Cuba arguing humanitarian solidarity, transfers part of the cost of that solidarity to the private sector through extralegal pressure, while the citizenry that finances the state through taxes has no access to information about how much is being spent or with what results. Solidarity, in this scheme, is mandatory for those who have something to lose before the government, and completely opaque for those who finance it without knowing.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

What this report has documented throughout its sections is not a sum of administrative irregularities nor a series of poorly managed agreements. It is evidence of a systematic and deliberate pattern: two governments with convergent interests have built, piece by piece, a legal framework that allows them to use public funds arbitrarily, outside any institutional check, to the detriment of their own citizens and to the benefit of their permanence in power and their regional political project.

On the Mexican side, that framework was built by eliminating the autonomous transparency body, capturing the legislative majority, and replacing independent oversight bodies with Executive Branch agencies. On the Cuban side, it was built over six decades of single-party rule, military control of the economy through GAESA, and the systematic use of its own citizens as bargaining chips in international missions that United Nations bodies have characterized as modern slavery.

The convergence of both models in the 2022–2026 period is not accidental: it is functional. The agreements analyzed in this report are the concrete result of that alliance. And their costs are paid, in Mexico, by citizens who have no access to adequately paid physicians of their own, who cannot audit how their money is spent, and who have no independent body to turn to. In Cuba, they are paid by exploited physicians, by citizens who continue to live with twenty-hour daily blackouts despite Mexico sending more than 1.5 billion dollars in oil, and by an entire population that has spent more than six decades without being able to change those who govern them.

What makes this situation especially serious is not only what occurs within each country: it is that the alliance between both governments amplifies and deepens the harm in both. The framework does not protect citizens: it excludes them. It does not manage public resources: it removes them from citizen oversight. It does not produce cooperation between nations: it produces cooperation between power elites at the expense of their populations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ORGANIZED CIVIL SOCIETY

Mexican civil society is, at this moment, the actor with the greatest capacity and legitimacy to demand what institutions have ceased to guarantee. Its organizations must coordinate to:

- Demand the restitution of an autonomous and independent transparency and access-to-information body, with real capacity to compel the Executive to deliver documentation on international agreements, contracts with third countries, and public budget use.
- Promote mechanisms for citizen auditing of agreements with Cuba and with any other country, allowing the tracing of committed resources' destination and documenting cases where agreements have resulted in harm to Mexican citizens.
- Articulate a common agenda with Cuban civil society organizations in exile and with international bodies specializing in trafficking in persons and forced labor, so that complaints about medical missions have organized interlocutors capable of sustaining them before bodies with sanctioning capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLITICAL PARTIES WITH LEGISLATIVE REPRESENTATION

Opposition parties have in the Mexico-Cuba agreements a terrain where the argument is not ideological but democratic: this is not about whether Mexico should or should not have relations with Cuba, but whether those relations should operate without transparency, without parliamentary debate, and without accountability. The priorities must be:

- Promote a legislative reform that restores the autonomy of the transparency body, with constitutional guarantees preventing its future capture or elimination by unilateral Executive decision.
- Promote the mandatory requirement that international agreements involving budgetary commitments be submitted to legislative debate and approval, with public information about the amounts, conditions, and evaluation mechanisms before their signing.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Media organizations have been, in many cases, the only actors capable of making visible what institutions conceal. The investigations by Latinus, Animal Político, El Universal, Eme Equis, and Diario de Cuba cited in this report are proof that independent journalism remains a real counterweight, even when institutional counterweights have been neutralized.

- Sustain continuous coverage of the Mexico-Cuba agreements not only at moments of scandal, but as systematic reporting that allows citizens to accumulate sufficient information to demand changes.
- Translate the technical complexity of the agreements, contracts in euros, Cuban state companies, logistics structures dispersed across 24 states, into accessible narratives that any Mexican citizen can understand: how much of their money went to Cuba, what was obtained in return, who benefited, and who paid the cost.

APPEAL TO THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

When a state's internal mechanisms have been captured or eliminated, the inter-American human rights system is the external guarantor to which citizens and civil organizations can turn. Mexican and Cuban civil society organizations must actively use the mechanisms of the inter-American system to document and denounce two categories of violations:

- The harm to the rights of Mexican citizens arising from the structural opacity in the management of public resources committed in international agreements.
- The complicity of the Mexican state in the trafficking in persons and forced labor scheme affecting Cuban physicians on its territory, as documented by Prisoners Defenders and recognized by the United Nations.

What is at stake is not only the Mexico-Cuba bilateral relationship. It is the model: if two governments can use public funds arbitrarily, outside any citizen oversight, to benefit their permanence in power and their regional project, without any internal or external mechanism being able to stop them, then democracy as a system ceases to be a real guarantee and becomes an empty formality. Documenting that model, denouncing it, and reversing it is the task this report proposes to those who have the capacity and responsibility to do so.

CHAPTER 12

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