Fake U.S. HIV Prevention Program in Secret Anti-Cuba Scheme

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A report from The Associated Press revealed that the U.S. government has been secretly sending young Latin Americans to Cuba under the guise of health and civic programs—including an HIV-prevention workshop—in hopes of provoking political change in the country. Advocates say the scheme could undermine international trust of U.S. global health efforts for years to come.

According to documents from the investigation, since 2009 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has paid nearly a dozen young people from Venezuela, Costa Rica and Peru to work undercover and scout for people they could turn into political activists.

The program was perpetuated through the contractor Creative Associates International. U.S. government reports show that it used the same pot of money that went into establishing the once-secret Cuban Twitter project ZunZeo, which the AP uncovered earlier this spring.

According to interviews with staff members, the U.S. government sent some workers into Cuba under the disguise of tourists. In another case, workers were told to set up an HIV workshop, which memos called “the perfect excuse” for perpetuating the U.S. government’s goals.

Many workers were not properly trained to avoid Cuban intelligence, and some were paid as little as $5.41 an hour. They were also given almost no safety net in the case that authorities discovered them, even as American contractor Alan Gross remains in prison for doing similar, clandestine work in the country.

The secret operation was part of a larger, multimillion-dollar USAID program working to effect change in “politically volatile” countries. It is currently illegal to work with foreign democracy-building programs in Cuba.

To read the full AP report, click here.

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