

Cuba's Health Ministry Opens Doors to A.A.

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For Immediate Release
Alcoholics Anonymous

Like China and Iran before it, the Cuban government officially recognized Alcoholics Anonymous with an invitation to participate in the Third International Meeting Against Drug Addiction, held in Guantánamo Cuba from November 7-9, 2018.

Doctors, addiction specialists, social workers, nurses, and medical students from Spain, the Dominican Republic, and Columbia — as well as from provinces throughout Cuba — participated in the three day conference themed, “Lifestyles vs. Toxic Habits.”

“We were invited by the Cuban Health Ministry to present,” said Dr. Peter Luongo, Executive Direction of the Institute for Research, Education and Training in Addictions (IRETA), and one of the nonalcoholic trustees of A.A.’s General Service Board. “I think all of us recognized that this was historic.”

A.A. meetings have been held for years in Cuba, but without official recognition as a civil organization by the Cuban government. Without such recognition, A.A. was unable to have an office, or even a telephone line, despite the fact that the country has an estimated 1,700 members and 100 active A.A. groups.

Scott H., A.A.’s Trustee-at-Large for Canada — who in a previous trip to Cuba, saw “the hunger for A.A.” — believes that the conference “is definitely a step in the right direction, maybe even a tipping point” for A.A. in Cuba. He and Dr. Luongo both credit Dr. Anselma Betancourt Pulsan, alcoholism specialist and Chair of the conference organizing committee, as being instrumental in securing the invitation for A.A.

A highlight of the conference was Dr. Luongo’s talk, “Healthcare Professionals and A.A.,” in which he outlined the ways that A.A. and the medical profession can work together to help address the problem of alcoholism. He pointed out that, despite his years of training on addiction, he never really learned anything about alcoholism, until he met sober alcoholics who were in A.A. and working in the treatment field. “I learned from them how important it is to incorporate Alcoholics Anonymous into the way we treat alcoholics.”

For more information on this or other notable events, contact A.A.’s Public Information Desk at the General Service Office at publicinfo@aa.org or (212) 870-3119.