



## Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux*

### **Cholera in Haiti: Fact Sheet**

The cholera epidemic ravaging Haiti is “one of the largest cholera outbreaks in modern history to affect a single country.”<sup>i</sup> Scientists who have studied the outbreak have “no doubt” that the disease was introduced by MINUSTAH, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti.<sup>ii</sup> The victims of this crisis are being denied both the means to combat the outbreak and redress for their suffering – and they know that blame lies at the feet of the UN.

This fact sheet provides the essential facts surrounding the cholera epidemic, the victims’ complaint against the UN, and what can be done to resolve this ongoing humanitarian disaster.

*Photo at right:* Eighty year old cholera patient (Pestel, Haiti).



#### **Importation of Cholera to Haiti by United Nations Personnel**

- Cholera is an acute, diarrheal illness transmitted through water or food infected with the bacterium *Vibrio cholera*; in the worst cases, it leads to rapid dehydration, shock, and without treatment, death within hours.<sup>iii</sup>
- The first Haitian cholera outbreak in more than 100 years was reported in October 2010 in the village of Meille – host to a camp of Nepalese troops serving with MINUSTAH.<sup>iv</sup>
- The UN Secretary General commissioned a panel of independent experts to investigate the source of the Haitian cholera outbreak. The panel reported “overwhelming” evidence that the UN is responsible for the epidemic:
  - Nepalese troops arrived in Meille shortly after departing cholera-endemic Kathmandu;
  - The Haitian cholera strains and those from Nepal in 2009 are “a perfect match,” while differing significantly from other recent cholera strains from the Western Hemisphere;
  - The sanitation conditions on the Meille MINUSTAH base were “inadequate” to prevent contamination of the nearby tributary to Haiti’s largest river; and,
  - The infection of the rest of Haiti can be traced back to the introduction of the South Asian cholera strain in Meille.<sup>v</sup>

#### **The Ongoing Epidemic Requires Urgent Action**

- The UN cholera epidemic has infected more than 500,000 and killed more than 7,000 Haitians since October 2011.<sup>vi</sup> The epidemic infects 97 new victims each day.<sup>vii</sup>
- The cholera bacteria brought to Haiti is particularly dangerous and transmissible,<sup>viii</sup> and has already spread to other countries in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>ix</sup>

## **Five Thousand Haitians Filed a Complaint Against the UN, Seeking Accountability for the Outbreak**

- Over 5,000 cholera victims and families of the deceased filed a complaint against the UN in November 2011.
- The complaint seeks (1) provision of the water and sanitation infrastructure necessary to control the epidemic, and health services for its victims; (2) damages for victims' losses; and, (3) an apology from the UN.
- The epidemic has deprived victims of their human right to access clean water, and the UN's failure to establish a claims commission deprives victims of their right to a remedy.

### **UN Member States Must Take Action**

- Member States must urge the Secretary General to take the following three steps in order to restore the UN's reputation as a force for rule of law and human rights:
  1. Provide the clean water infrastructure, sanitation, and medical treatment necessary to eradicate cholera;
  2. Create a standing claims commission in accordance with the Status of Forces Agreement to provide relief to cholera victims like those who have filed complaints; and,
  3. Publicly accept the United Nations' responsibility for the outbreak and apologize to the Haitian people.
- The focus on water and sanitation echoes the pleas of experts in the field, who have noted that ending cholera in Haiti requires "a multifaceted approach set up by experts but engaging local citizens.... Cholera has to be attacked from all sides. Expert knowledge, organization, money, and transparency are all needed."<sup>x</sup> WHO, PAHO, and others also support the focus on water and sanitation. In January 2012, they called for major international investment in water and sanitation infrastructure in order to eradicate cholera in Haiti and the Dominican Republic."<sup>xi</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Medicalxpress.com, "Haiti cholera death toll nears 7,000: expert" (Jan. 6, 2012) (quoting Jon Andrus, PAHO).

<sup>ii</sup> See Mosk, Matthew, ABC News, "Scientists: UN Soldiers Brought Deadly Superbug to Americas," (Jan. 12, 2011) (quoting epidemiologist Renaud Piarroux).

<sup>iii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *General Information (Cholera)*, <http://www.cdc.gov/cholera/general/>.

<sup>iv</sup> Piarroux, *et al.*, *Understanding the Cholera Epidemic, Haiti*, Emerging Infectious Diseases (July 2011).

<sup>v</sup> Cravioto, *et al.*, *Final Report of the Independent Panel of Experts on the Cholera Outbreak in Haiti*.

<sup>vi</sup> Ministère Haitien de la Santé Publique et de la Population, *Rapport de Cas*, 20 Janvier 2012, available at <http://www.mspp.gouv.ht/site/downloads/Rapport%20journalier%20MSPP%20du%2020%20janvier%202012.pdf>.

<sup>vii</sup> Ministère Haitien de la Santé Publique et de la Population, *Rapport de Cas*, 20 Janvier 2012, available at <http://www.mspp.gouv.ht/site/downloads/Rapport%20journalier%20MSPP%20du%2020%20janvier%202012.pdf>.

<sup>viii</sup> See Mosk, Matthew, ABC News, "Scientists: UN Soldiers Brought Deadly Superbug to Americas," (Jan. 12, 2011) (quoting John Mekalanos, chair of the Department of Microbiology and Immunobiology at Harvard Medical School).

<sup>ix</sup> Jacqui Goddard, New York Times "Case of Cholera in Florida Is Linked to Haiti Outbreak," (Nov. 17, 2010).

<sup>x</sup> Carroll, "Cholera and Blame in Rural Haiti," available at <http://blogs.pjstar.com/haiti/2012/01/27/cholera-and-blame-in-rural-haiti/>.

<sup>xi</sup> PAHO, Experts Call for Major Investment in Water and Sanitation to End Cholera in Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Jan. 12, 2012), <http://new.paho.org/blogs/haiti/?p=2182>.