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## **Human Rights Groups and NGOs Support Congressional Call for UN Response to Cholera**

July 18, 2012, Washington, D.C. – Human Rights groups, faith-based organizations and NGOs working for a just and sustainable post-earthquake recovery in Haiti commend a letter sent by 104 members of the U.S. Congress to Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, requesting that she urge the world body to act decisively to address Haiti’s cholera crisis. This important appeal was sponsored by Representative John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI) and delivered to Ambassador Rice July 17, 2012.

Cholera has killed more than 7,450 Haitians and infected over 580,000 since October 2010. The situation remains critical, with nearly 40,000 new infections and 290 deaths since May of this year, according to Haitian health authorities. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that cholera will persist in Haiti unless sustainable water and sanitation systems are put in place.

"The United Nations has a clear responsibility to help right this terrible wrong," said Ruth Messinger, president of **American Jewish World Service**. "Haitians and everyone throughout the island of Hispaniola deserve their basic rights - access to clean water and a sanitation system that helps contain, not spread infectious diseases."

"Members of Congress have joined a growing chorus calling for UN authorities to work with Haiti’s government and the Haitian people to confront and ultimately eliminate cholera," said Rachele Lyndaker Schlabach, director of **Mennonite Central Committee** US Washington Office.

"**Church World Service** thanks all the Members of Congress who have signed this important letter," Martin Shupack, Director of Advocacy, Church World Service (CWS). "Too many tragedies have befallen Haitians in recent years: damaging floods and hurricanes, a devastating earthquake, and now - through no fault of their own - the introduction of cholera into Haitian rivers and water systems. But although international response was swift and generous after January 2010, there has not been equally

urgent action to rid the country of cholera. Justice and the need for a fair chance demand that we rally around this call for improved water systems, treatment of patients, and the establishment of a bi-national plan with the Haitian and Dominican governments, ministries and communities. The loss of so many lives is unacceptable; appropriate authorities must ensure that no more are allowed to die.”

According to Elaine Zuckerman, President of **Gender Action**, “the World Bank, a UN agency, and Inter-American Development Bank, have committed over US\$ 127 million to 12 different water and sanitation and cholera programs since the earthquake. Yet by the banks’ own data, just under US\$ 52 million has been disbursed. Even disbursed funds are unlikely to have been spent yet on water and sanitation infrastructure needed to curb the cholera epidemic, let alone on assisting cholera victims. The crisis continues.” Zuckerman says that “what is needed is not just more promised money, but delivered projects to halt the spread of cholera and treat its victims.”

The Congressional letter cites the March 2012 acknowledgment by UN Special Envoy to Haiti and Former U.S. President Bill Clinton that the UN’s actions were the “proximate cause” of the epidemic, and emphasizes that the UN must take action to control the outbreak, which infects 600 more people each day, according to the Haitian Government.

The letter also echoes demands made by 5,000 Haitian victims of cholera who filed claims with the UN in November 2011, seeking investments in water and sanitation infrastructure to control the epidemic. Since that lawsuit was filed, editorials in the [New York Times](#) and [Washington Post](#) have also called for the UN and the international community to take responsibility swiftly in ending the cholera epidemic.

Nicole Lee, President of **TransAfrica Forum**, “commends the over one hundred Members of Congress who have added their voices to those of the Haitian people and so many others who are calling on the United Nations to fight and ultimately contain the cholera epidemic in Haiti. The UN must prioritize treating the sick and preventing the continuing spread of cholera and the only way to ensure that Haitians do not remain vulnerable to cholera is to build adequate water and sanitation infrastructure. The UN should provide leadership and funding to make that goal a reality.”

“Congress’ call to action reflects a growing consensus that the UN has a moral and legal responsibility to address Haiti’s cholera epidemic, and that it must do so urgently before more lives are lost,” said Brian Concannon Jr., Director of the **Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH)** and Counsel for the victims. “To do anything less would undermine the UN’s core missions of promoting human rights and fighting disease,” Concannon added.

Geneticists have precisely matched the epidemic strain in Haiti to a particularly virulent, deadly cholera strain found in Nepal in the summer of 2010. Independent scientific studies have established that this cholera was brought to Haiti by Nepalese troops to the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), and that their waste disposal practices at their base allowed the bacteria to contaminate Haiti’s largest river system.

The full letter is available at : <http://ijdh.org/archives/26647>