June 29, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
United States Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to urge the State Department to immediately and unreservedly exercise its leadership to ensure that the United Nations (UN) take concrete steps to eliminate the cholera epidemic introduced to Haiti in 2010 by waste from a UN peacekeeper camp, and to comply with its legal and moral obligations to provide cholera victims with access to an effective remedy.

A recently revealed internal UN report confirms that the Haiti mission, known as MINUSTAH, was discharging untreated waste into Haiti’s environment from several peacekeeping bases, and continued this unacceptable practice after the cholera outbreak. The official cumulative death toll since 2010 — nearly 10,000—makes Haiti’s epidemic the worst cholera epidemic of modern times, but recent scientific studies suggest that the true death toll may be three to ten times higher. Since we last wrote to Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon in December 2014 urging action, the epidemic’s damage to the people of Haiti and to the UN’s credibility has become more catastrophic, while the UN’s response to the emergency has dwindled. Cholera increased in the first three months of 2016 compared to the previous year.

While the deaths, illness, and evidence of malfeasance mounted, UN Assistant Secretary-General Pedro Medrano Rojas, who met with Congress as the UN’s point person for responding to the epidemic, left office in June 2015 and was not replaced. The UN continues to refuse to even discuss providing compensation for the losses incurred by those killed and sickened by the cholera it brought to Haiti, and there is no notable progress in its proclaimed efforts to provide the water and sanitation infrastructure necessary to control the cholera epidemic.

In calling for a more effective response to the UN cholera epidemic, we are joining the weight of world opinion, both inside and outside the UN. Five of the UN’s own human rights experts—four UN Special Rapporteurs and the UN’s Independent Expert on Human Rights in Haiti—wrote to the UN Secretary-General in October 2015 that “it is essential that the victims of cholera have access to a transparent, independent and impartial mechanism that can review their claims and decide on the merits of those claims in order to ensure adequate reparation....” Amnesty International has stressed that “the legacy of the UN in Haiti, and particularly of MINUSTAH, will be greatly determined by the way the United Nations responds to this very important situation.”

In July 2015, 154 Haitian-American groups and leaders from across the United States asked you to ensure that the United States’ support for UN immunity in U.S. courts did not result in
impunity for the UN’s damage in Haiti. At a recent hearing in the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, the panel of judges questioned why the State Department had not used its diplomatic powers to press for a more just UN response. A judge asked the U.S. Attorney to concede that the result of leaving the victims without a remedy would be “very, very bad.”

While we do not wish to take a position in the litigation, we are deeply concerned that the State Department’s failure to take more leadership in the diplomatic realm might be perceived by our constituents and the world as a limited commitment to an accountable and credible UN. As the Boston Globe Editorial Board recently wrote, Congress and the Department of State “have a moral duty to lead the way, not follow — outside the courtroom walls.”

Each day that passes without an appropriate UN response is a tragedy for Haitian cholera victims, and a stain on the UN’s reputation. As the Special Rapporteurs stated, “the denial of the fundamental right of the victims of cholera to justice and to an effective remedy is difficult to reconcile with the United Nations’ commitment to ‘promote and encourage respect for human rights.’” We are especially concerned that the UN’s refusal to comply with its legal responsibility for cholera deeply undermines the organizations’ rule of law and democracy-building work throughout the world that American taxpayers support so generously.

Mr. Secretary, we respectfully urge the Department of State to treat the issue of a just and accountable UN response to Haiti’s cholera with the urgency that 10,000-100,000 deaths and catastrophic damage to the UN’s credibility deserves. A just resolution is imperative to protecting the human rights of victims, and to preserving the UN’s role as a champion for human rights.

Your leadership in this noble and urgent endeavor is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mia Love
Member of Congress

Robert Brady
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress
Mark DeSaulnier  
Member of Congress

Richard Neal  
Member of Congress

John Lewis  
Member of Congress

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

Marc Veasey  
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan  
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress

Mario Diaz-Balart  
Member of Congress

Stacey Plaskett  
Member of Congress

Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress

Marcia Fudge  
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Matt Cartwright  
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Carlos Curbelo  
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Joseph Crowley  
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Mark Takano  
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Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress

Lee Zeldin  
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress

Tim Ryan  
Member of Congress

Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

Ron Kind  
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Kathleen Rice  
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack  
Member of Congress

Hakeem Jeffries  
Member of Congress

Chris Gibson  
Member of Congress
Michael M. Honda  
Member of Congress

Katherine Clark  
Member of Congress

Daniel Donovan  
Member of Congress

David E. Price  
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress

Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress

Bobby Rush  
Member of Congress

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Member of Congress

Jose E. Serrano  
Member of Congress

Elijah Cummings  
Member of Congress

Gregory Meeks  
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson  
Member of Congress
Albio Sires  
Member of Congress

Donald M. Payne, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress

Alcee Hastings  
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

Charlie Rangel  
Member of Congress

Chris Smith  
Member of Congress

Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Sanford Bishop  
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

Luis V. Gutiérrez  
Member of Congress

Adam Schiff  
Member of Congress

Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress

Wm. Lacy Clay  
Member of Congress
John Garamendi  
Member of Congress

Madeleine Bordallo  
Member of Congress

Donna F. Edwards  
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress

André Carson  
Member of Congress

Steve Israel  
Member of Congress

Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress

Eliot L. Engel  
Member of Congress

Paul Tonko  
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier  
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

Eddie Bernice Johnson  
Member of Congress

Gene Green  
Member of Congress
C. A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

Jared Polis
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress

Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress

Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress

Joseph P. Kennedy
Member of Congress

Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress

John Yarmuth
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress
Judy Chu  
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Bill Foster  
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Louise M. Slaughter  
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Grace F. Napolitano  
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Linda T. Sánchez  
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Julia Brownley  
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Ed Perlmutter  
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Janice Hahn  
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Norma J. Torres  
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Jim Himes  
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Robert C. "Bobby" Scott  
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Steve Chabot  
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Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress

Michelle Lujan Grisham  
Member of Congress