

MAXINE WATERS

MEMBER OF CONGRESS
43RD DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE:
FINANCIAL SERVICES
RANKING MEMBER

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0535

July 5, 2016

PLEASE REPLY TO:
WASHINGTON DC OFFICE

2221 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
 WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0535
PHONE: (202) 225-2201
FAX: (202) 225-7854

DISTRICT OFFICE:
LOS ANGELES OFFICE

10124 SOUTH BROADWAY
SUITE 1
 LOS ANGELES, CA 90003
PHONE: (323) 757-8900
FAX: (323) 757-9506

The Honorable Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
The United Nations UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Secretary-General:

I am writing, as a friend of the people of Haiti and of the United Nations, on the anniversary of your response to the May 30, 2013, letter that I and 18 of my colleagues in the House of Representatives sent you regarding the UN response to the cholera epidemic that UN peacekeepers introduced into Haiti in 2010.

I appreciate the letter that you sent us on July 5, 2013, but I am deeply concerned that in the three years since our exchange, Haiti's cholera epidemic continues to infect and kill Haitians at an alarming rate. Meanwhile, the UN has done little to install the water and sanitation infrastructure necessary to stop the epidemic and nothing to compensate the victims for their losses.

According to the Pan American Health Organization, in the first third of 2016, cholera sickened 13,859 Haitians and killed 150, the highest rate for that period since our 2013 letter. Alarming, a Doctors Without Borders study published in March indicated that the total death toll of the cholera epidemic could be three to ten times higher than the official figure of nearly 10,000 dead.

I appreciate your assurance that you were "personally committed to ensuring that the United Nations and the international community spare no effort to help Haiti in this time of need." Assistant Secretary-General Pedro Medrano Rojas, appointed to coordinate the UN response, subsequently provided us similar assurances. However, Mr. Medrano left his post a year ago, and has not, to my knowledge, been replaced. Nor has there been evident progress on the infrastructure projects you described in your letter.

In response to our concern that the cholera victims' reasonable demand for compensation was not being considered, your 2013 letter noted that your Legal Counsel had informed the victims that their claim "is not receivable." But as you know, five top UN human rights experts, in a letter released in March, concluded that this approach "undermines the reputation of the United Nations, calls into question the ethical framework within which its peace-keeping forces operate, and challenges the credibility of the organization as an entity that respects human rights."

I believe that this development provides you an opportunity to reconsider the technical advice provided by your Legal Counsel, in light of the organization's mandate to promote human rights and the rule of law.

The longer that the cholera health crisis has persisted, the more the cholera accountability crisis has grown. As a strong supporter of the UN and its ideals throughout my twenty-five years in the U.S. Congress, it pains me to see the recent revelations that highlight the gap between the UN's principles and its practices regarding the cholera epidemic, from the nationwide sanitation problems at the MINUSTAH bases to the untenability of the UN's legal positions. I believe that this accountability crisis is sharply reducing the credibility that the UN needs to carry out its important work, especially promoting stability, democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

My colleagues and I in the United States Congress entrust you with substantial sums to fund the UN's work. Although a just response to the cholera epidemic would require expenditures, squandering the UN's credibility by not responding justly imperils the effectiveness of billions allocated to current and future UN activities.

I therefore urge you to ensure that the UN's response to the cholera epidemic is sufficient to ensure justice for the people of Haiti and maintain the credibility and leadership of the UN. I appreciate your attention to my concerns, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Maxine Waters
Member of Congress