



## Broken UN Promises Lead to Haiti Cholera Resurgence

*Cholera advocates denounce UN failure to eliminate deadly disease brought to Haiti by UN peacekeepers*

October 11, 2022 (Port-au-Prince, Haiti; Boston, MA) — The UN’s refusal to keep its promise to invest \$400 million to fight the cholera epidemic it brought Haiti has allowed the disease to once again threaten Haitians with widespread sickness and death. On Saturday, October 1, amid [rising insecurity](#) that is blocking access to clean water and medical care, the Haitian Minister of Public Health and Population [confirmed](#) a resurgence of cholera first brought to Haiti in 2010 when the UN recklessly discharged it into a Haitian river.

Although the UN [apologized](#) for its role and conceded “that eliminating cholera must be priority number one,” the UN never followed through on its [promise](#) to improve access to the necessary water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure to fully eliminate the disease. It also never met its legal obligation to provide compensation to individual victims, leaving Haiti and Haitians vulnerable to continued outbreaks.

“This horrific consequence of the UN’s twelve-year evasion of responsibility was not only predictable, it was widely predicted,” said Mario Joseph, Managing Attorney of the Haiti-based human rights law firm *Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI), which supported victims of cholera in their fight for justice.

In January 2022, the UN [congratulated](#) Haiti on being cholera-free after three years without recording any new cases. However, health and human rights experts [warned](#) that the celebration may be [premature](#), given limited case surveillance and lack of improvement in the water and sanitation systems needed for long-term protection.

The resurgence comes amidst an [acute governance and humanitarian crisis](#) in Haiti, leading experts to warn of a “[cholera time bomb](#).” Gangs control large swaths of the country and have blocked access to Haiti’s largest fuel terminal, [forcing hospitals to close](#) and [limiting access](#) to potable water and food across the country - Haiti’s largest supplier of potable water just [announced](#) that it has run out of fuel to treat and deliver water. Ongoing insecurity and lack of fuel will also impede any efforts to deliver filtration systems and purifying tablets or to help those falling ill to reach care centers being erected. Health authorities have [reported](#) sixteen deaths and [many more](#) hospitalizations, but the World Health Organization has [warned](#) that the true death toll from cholera is likely much higher already and will probably continue to rise. Cholera [has also reached](#) Haiti’s National Penitentiary - where it has [killed](#) at least nine and up to 80 - and other prisons where people are kept in inhumane conditions, including open toilets, no medical care, and no food for days on end.

The UN-imported cholera killed over 10,000 people and infected nearly 1 million between 2010 and 2019. Victims of cholera have tirelessly [sought reparations](#) from the UN for over a decade through [lawsuits](#) and [advocacy](#), including the WASH infrastructure needed to fully eliminate the disease.

“As the body that is responsible for bringing cholera to Haiti, the UN has a legal responsibility to eliminate it and compensate victims for the harms suffered,” said Beatrice Lindstrom, Clinical Instructor and Lecturer on Law at Harvard Law School, who led litigation efforts in support of UN cholera victims.

In 2016, the UN finally bowed to mounting pressure and launched a “[New Approach to Cholera in Haiti](#),” promising to improve WASH systems and provide material assistance to the victims. But it has raised only [five percent](#) of the \$400 million promised, and despite the UN’s “[multi-stakeholder](#)” fundraising effort toward improving WASH systems, which it deemed “essential” to eliminate cholera, access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation remains [virtually unimproved](#). The UN has also [refused](#) to compensate victims of the outbreak for lost wages, medical expenses, and funeral costs. Its own experts [called](#) the UN’s persistent failures “not only a violation of [cholera victims’] human right to an effective remedy, but also...a grave breach of public confidence in the Organization's integrity and legitimacy.” Now, we are witnessing the human consequences.

Cholera’s resurgence in Haiti is a stark reminder of the costs of unaccountable international intervention in Haiti, and comes as [some](#) - including Haiti’s U.S.-backed [de facto Prime Minister](#) - have [called](#) for renewed military intervention to respond to the deepening political and insecurity crisis. The ruling *Pati Ayisyen Tèt Kale* (PHTK) party has systematically dismantled Haiti’s democratic institutions for over a decade, with [support](#) from the international community. The government’s documented collaboration with gangs to suppress dissent, combined with its politicization of the police and justice systems, has allowed gangs to expand throughout the country, resulting in the current insecurity crisis. For [months](#), Haitians have been taking to the streets en masse to [demand](#) the resignation of de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

The calls to send troops to Haiti have been [widely rejected](#) by Haitians. They note the last UN intervention, like [previous interventions](#), was an [expensive, deadly, failure](#) that also failed to bring sustained improvement to Haiti. Haitians are instead [demanding](#) that the international community, and especially the United States, stop propping up the country’s corrupt, repressive, and illegitimate de facto government.

Brian Concannon, Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti, said, “to bring stability to Haiti, the international community needs to step out of Haitian politics and step into fulfilling its humanitarian role. The UN in particular needs to do so by fulfilling its legal obligations to the UN cholera victims. If the UN had put the \$9 billion it spent on a fruitless military mission into infrastructure that helped Haitians obtain clean water and other basic needs, countless lives would have been saved.”

“The UN was supposed to bring rule of law, but instead it left a legacy of impunity,” Mario Joseph added. “The organization must act immediately in line with its human rights principles to stem this outbreak.”

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