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### **Ten mothers of 11 children abandoned by UN peacekeepers bring a legal action to recover child support and establish custody**

**Port-au-Prince, December 11, 2017** – After having been impregnated and abandoned by United Nations peacekeeping soldiers, ten Haitian women brought claims for child support and to establish custody against the fathers with a Court of First Instance in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel. One of the mothers was 17 years old when she gave birth, which amounts to statutory rape under Haitian law. The soldiers have since returned to Uruguay, Argentina, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka, leaving the women to care for the children [without support](#).

The petitioners seek a legal order in accordance with international and Haitian law, including a Haitian Decree of September 14, 1983 that authorizes child support claims. According to Mario Joseph, managing lawyer with the BAI and attorney for the mothers of the children abandoned by the soldiers, “These mothers and their children face severe economic difficulties and discrimination. Six of the mothers were left homeless after Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.”

The UN has repeatedly made commitments to end sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeeper soldiers, including supporting mothers with paternity claims. In September 2017, UN Secretary General [António Guterres](#) reiterated this as a personal priority, pledging to “end impunity for those guilty of sexual exploitation and abuse,” at a meeting addressing SEA committed by UN peacekeepers. He added that the UN “do[es] not tolerate anybody who commits or tolerates sexual exploitation and abuse.” For years, the UN has committed to “work with the Member States to facilitate, in their area of competence, the prosecution of claims related to paternity and child support.” Yet the victims are far from finding a practical and adequate response.

According to Attorney Joseph, “Despite formal notices of summons (intent to file paternity claims) served on August 3, 2016, via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Haiti, Yvon Zetrenne, with the Court of First Instance of Port-au-Prince, and Sandra Honoré, Special Representative to the Secretary General of the United Nations in Haiti and head of MINUSTAH at the time, the UN never responded.”

Attorney Joseph added, “We appreciate Secretary General, Mr. Guterres' commitment, but as it is said in Latin, *Acta et non verba*. The UN has had an official “zero tolerance” policy for years, but in practice, impunity is the norm. Despite repeated commitments, the UN has not taken appropriate measures to accompany the victims, and no measures have been taken against peacekeepers who have abandoned their children.”

According to the UN's [resolution on the assistance of victims of sexual abuse and exploitation](#), the UN should provide petitioners with “basic assistance and support according to their individual needs arising directly from the alleged sexual exploitation and abuse.” The assistance and support should include,

“medical care, judicial services, and support in order to face the psychological and social effects of the experience and immediate material care, like food, clothing, emergency and a safe shelter, if necessary.” Lawyer Joseph affirms that some of the mothers received a temporary part-time job from the UN and a DNA test, although the test results were never sent. The mothers received no other assistance from the UN.

The child support and paternity claims are filed in the context of increased UN [reports](#) documenting exploitation and abuse committed by the peacekeepers in [Haiti](#) and [other countries](#), as well as the [lack of responsibility](#) for those acts. The UN also took its time before accepting its [responsibility](#) for the damage caused by MINUSTAH in the introduction of cholera in Haiti. Cholera has already reportedly infected over 800,000 Haitians and taken 10,000 lives. The UN finally admitted its responsibility in December 2016, and promised a [new approach](#) with two tracks: 1) eradicating cholera and 2) giving compensation to the victims, which still has not happened.

The legal summons before the Haitian courts to 1) Antonio Rodrigue, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Culture, 2) Susan Page, Representative of the General Secretary of the UN and head of MINUJUSTH and 3) MINUSTAH peacekeeping soldiers who abandoned their children in Haiti follows the formal notice of summons filed on August 3, 2016. By these actions, the petitioners ask that the UN furnish the following information : a) identification of the fathers, identification documents, their commanders and the officers responsible for the investigating these allegations, b) information related to any investigation by the UN’s Conduct and Discipline, MINUSTAH or any other UN relevant agency related to the mothers’ paternity claims, and any decisions rendered, c) a determination of whether the actions of the father soldiers in entering sexual relations, impregnating and abandoning the petitioners are part of the official duties of the soldiers as members of MINUSTAH, in order to verify if the functional immunity of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between the UN and Haiti is applicable in these cases; and d) to provide the DNA test results.

At the 72<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly of the UN on September 21, 2017, President Monsieur [Jovenel Moïse](#) denounced the UN’s “hateful acts of sexual exploitation and violence perpetrated by some peacekeepers or other members of the personnel.” Attorney Joseph hopes that these child support and paternity claims will “challenge the UN to conform to its own principles and its promises to better address the sexual exploitation and abuse committed by the peacekeepers in Haiti and worldwide.”