



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Lawyers Denounce UN's Failure to Cooperate in Paternity and Child Support Suits Against UN Peacekeepers

**(Boston and Port-au-Prince, January 14, 2019)** – Lawyers for Haitian mothers who have filed child support actions against UN peacekeepers [today](#) slammed the UN's approach to their case as “non-responsive, non-cooperative and opaque.” The UN has committed to providing assistance and judicial cooperation in such cases, but in a letter to UN Victims' Rights Advocate Jane Connors, attorneys from the *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI) and Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) demonstrated how the UN's “lack of follow-through with its commitment to victims has made it nearly impossible for our clients to obtain justice.”

The letter documents that the UN has refused to furnish evidence in its possession, such as the result of DNA tests that are vital to the mothers' cases, and is violating a Haitian court order compelling it to do so. It details that the UN has also circumvented the victims' lawyers and instead approached them directly with information critical to their cases, denying them the assistance of their lawyers in violation of Haitian law. The UN's approach “sends an alarming message of lack of respect for the Haitian judicial system and the rule of law” states the letter.

“The UN makes grand claims about supporting the dignity and rights of victims of peacekeeper sexual exploitation and abuse, yet for over two years it has failed to share critical evidence in our clients' court cases or provide adequate assistance to these women and children” said Mario Joseph, Managing Attorney of the BAI, who represents the mothers of children abandoned by UN soldiers.

Victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by UN peacekeepers have a right to pursue child support claims in national courts. Pursuant to the Status of Forces Agreement between the UN and Haitian Government and UN policies, the UN is [obligated](#) to cooperate in these court actions. Eighteen months ago, the UN also [appointed](#) a Victims' Rights Advocate to “ensure that the full



effect of local laws, including remedies for victims, are brought to bear” in peacekeeper sex abuse cases. The UN’s victim assistance [policy](#) also requires the organization to provide victims of SEA with appropriate individualized assistance, including medical care and support for victims’ immediate material needs.

“The UN has provided only temporary and inadequate assistance to some of our clients, while denying it to others, and has failed to explain the reasoning behind its decisions” said Sandra Wisner, program lawyer at IJDH. Many victims “have been living in extremely precarious situations for quite some time; several of the children have severe health problems, while other families are homeless” the letter states.

Today’s critique follows more than two years of advocacy by the BAI and IJDH to seek the UN’s cooperation in the Haitian child support cases, and comes more than nine months after Victims’ Rights Advocate Jane Connors [met with the women in question](#) to hear directly from them about their living situations and court claims and to assure them of the UN’s commitment to them and of continued dialogue with the BAI moving forward.

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