

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2016

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

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to encourage the State Department engage with the international community to expeditiously address the ongoing cholera epidemic in Haiti and urge the United Nations (UN) to remedy this public health emergency. The situation originated from infected members of the UN's peacekeeping contingent who were in Haiti responding to the humanitarian crisis that emerged after the 2010 earthquake.

As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has struggled to recover from the strongest quake to affect the nation in over two centuries. Today, six years later, over 60,000 people remain displaced and require humanitarian assistance to support their basic needs and protection. Despite an independent report<sup>1</sup> stating that faulty sanitation from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) introduced the cholera bacteria, the UN has refused to take responsibility. Instead, the UN asserted immunity under the 1946 Convention on Privileges and Immunities, and claimed that a confluence of factors caused the epidemic. While Haitians are denied remuneration or a transparent mechanism to resolve claims for compensation, cholera continues to cause significant morbidity and mortality across the country.

Since the beginning of the epidemic in 2010, Haiti has registered 731,058 cholera cases and 8,984 deaths,<sup>2</sup> historically more than any other known cholera outbreak in the Americas. At the end of 2015, the Haitian Ministry of Health reported 36,045 suspected cases of cholera and 309 fatalities.<sup>3</sup> The country's population continues to be vulnerable to the disease due to a lack of safe drinking water and poor sanitation. Additionally, a strained health care infrastructure combined with food insecurity, natural hazards, and migration issues may lead to a sustained presence of the disease without immediate action by global partners, and perhaps most importantly, UN accountability.

The United States should utilize its leadership position to stress the importance of UN accountability and action to remediate the ongoing impact of cholera in Haiti. Additionally, the State Department is in a unique position to facilitate a dialogue with the UN and other global partners about mobilizing a sustainable public health strategy that mitigates the spread of cholera in the country. Preventative measures like developing nationwide water and sanitation systems, building latrines, enhancing access to medical facilities, and continuing to distribute hygiene

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/haiti/UN-cholera-report-final.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Haiti\\_2016%20HNO\\_03%20Mar%202016.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Haiti_2016%20HNO_03%20Mar%202016.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



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interventions and vaccines will require significant support from donor countries and partnering organizations. These efforts should be rooted in the financial stewardship and guidance of the UN.

We join our colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives by expressing the importance of U.S. diplomatic engagement to ensure that claims related to the cholera outbreak are appropriately and transparently adjudicated, and that the UN institutes proactive measures to reduce risks for the host nations in which it operates.

A comprehensive, united effort to address the cholera epidemic in Haiti is crucial to eliminate the spread of the disease and mitigate additional fatalities as a result of this deadly scourge. We respectfully urge the State Department to press the UN to take responsibility for the cholera crisis in Haiti and undertake a meaningful response that moves the Haitian people toward a long term resolution of this public health crisis.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator