

Four Years After Cholera Outbreak, UN Secretary General Visits Haiti

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United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon visited Haiti on Jul. 14-15 in an effort to resuscitate a stalled \$2.2 billion UN plan to eliminate cholera from Haiti over the next decade.

Launched in December 2012, the UN “initiative” was really nothing more than the repackaging of the “Initiative for the Elimination of Cholera in the Island of Hispaniola” launched by the Haitian and Dominican governments in January 2012, as Jonathon Katz and Tom Murphy pointed out in a scathing [“Foreign Policy” article](#).

Since the UN rebranded the plan, it has been unable in over 18 months to raise even the \$400 million needed to fund the project for its first two years. Meanwhile, the UN spent some \$609 million to deploy about 7,000 UN soldiers in Haiti during FY 2013/2014 as part of the thoroughly despised and almost weekly protested decade-old UN Mission to Stabilize Haiti (MINUSTAH).

It was, in fact, MINUSTAH soldiers from Nepal who imported cholera into Haiti by allowing sewage from their outhouses to flow into the headwaters of Haiti’s largest river in October 2010, at least [ten scientific studies](#), including one commissioned by the UN itself, agree.

However, the UN has refused to accept legal responsibility for causing what is now the world’s worst cholera epidemic, which has killed over 8,500 and sickened over 704,000 Haitians. Three lawsuits have been filed in New York courts demanding reparations and an apology from the UN for its negligence in Haiti. The UN has claimed it has immunity, and UN officials have been hiding from court officers trying to serve them with papers, although [one server caught up with Ban](#) Ki-moon at *The Asia Society* in late June.

In Haiti, Ban Ki-moon and his wife, joined by Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe, engaged in an extended photo-op to deflect criticism and say that the UN had a “moral duty” to help stop the spread of cholera in Haiti.

“This is a necessary pilgrimage for me,” Ban told villagers in a church in Los Palmas on Haiti’s Central Plateau near where the epidemic started. “My wife and I have come here to grieve with you. As a father and grandfather, and as a mother and grandmother, we feel tremendous anguish at the pain you have had to endure.”

Along with Lamothe, Ban also helped launch the Haitian government’s “Total Sanitation

Campaign,” a five-year plan, already funded with \$14 million from Canada and Japan, which aims to improve sanitation for 3.8 million Haitians in 20 cholera-plagued rural communes.

The Boston-based Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) and the Port-au-Prince-based Office of International Lawyers (BAI) were the first lawyers to [bring a lawsuit](#) in the New York courts on behalf of 5,000 cholera victims in October 2013. The lawsuit came after the UN claimed immunity after the IJDH/BAI lawyers attempted to [seek redress](#) through the UN’s own grievance system in November 2011.

On Jul. 7, the U.S. Justice Department wrote to the Judge J. Paul Oetken in the New York case to say that the “United States has consistently asserted the absolute immunity of the UN to lawsuits filed against it in U.S. courts” and “urges the Court to dismiss this action.”

The IJDH/BAI lawyers are trying to have the case litigated as a class-action lawsuit.

“Secretary-General Ban’s visit demonstrates why Haiti needs justice, not charity,” IJDH lawyer Brian Concannon, Jr. told *Haiti Liberté*.

“His talk of ‘moral duty’ and new programs on this visit just add to his other empty gestures, such as the 2012 launch of the Cholera Free Hispaniola Initiative that has not started almost two years later. Haitians are dying of the UN cholera epidemic, the UN has a legal responsibility to stop that killing, and has the resources to do so. It is time for all of us to join with Haitian grassroots activists and make sure that the UN obeys the law.”

Ban also met with President Michel Martelly as well as the presidents of Haiti’s House of Deputies and Senate to discuss the political impasse over Haiti’s unconstitutional electoral council, which Martelly has sought to unilaterally impose.

On Jul. 15, about 50 protestors gathered outside a stadium being constructed on Route Neuf outside Cité Soleil, in which Ban, Martelly, and Lamothe took pictures with International Olympic Committee president Thomas Bach. The protestors sang chants and held signs which said: “MINUSTAH = Cholera”, “Ban Ki-Moon Go Home”, and “Down with the UN Occupation of Haiti.”

“We are outraged that Ban Ki-Moon comes here to hypocritically say he cares about our plight while at the same time he refuses to take responsibility for unleashing cholera in Haiti,” said Oxygène David of the party Dessalines Coordination (KOD), whose militants made up more than half of the demonstrators at Route Neuf.

“We demand that UN troops to leave Haiti, and Ban is deaf. We ask for cholera reparations, and Ban is deaf. Through massacres carried out by their soldiers and the importation of cholera, the UN is responsible for thousands upon thousands of Haitian deaths. So don’t try to tell us that you’re the solution to the problems you’ve created.”

After Haiti, Ban Ki-moon travels to the Dominican Republic, where he will meet with President Danilo Medina.

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