September 19, 2016

His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary-General
United Nations Headquarters
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

We, the undersigned experts on international law, human rights, public health, and development, are writing regarding the United Nations’ recent acknowledgment that it played a role in causing the cholera epidemic in Haiti. The United Nations now has a critical opportunity to develop a response consistent with its international legal obligations and with international human rights norms. To do so, the response must include a public apology, compensation for victims, and full funding for cholera elimination. Moreover, the process must be inclusive and transparent, and involve participation of Haitians throughout.

In order to discharge its duties to victims, the Secretariat must build on its acceptance of responsibility through concrete actions. Established human rights principles, coupled with the rule of law, require an effective remedy, which entails acknowledgment of responsibility, specific institutional steps to guarantee non-repetition, and meaningful reparations. Human rights and rule-of-law commitments further require inclusivity and transparency of process in the development of a remedy. Any solution the United Nations adopts must observe these substantive and procedural norms.

An effective remedy requires: (1) issuing a formal, public apology to the victims of cholera in Haiti, (2) ensuring full funding of the previously announced but largely unfunded cholera elimination plan, (3) committing to providing victims of the epidemic with material compensation in a timely fashion, and (4) implementing a transparent and participatory process. The Secretariat must also exercise the leadership necessary to ensure robust funding for its new approach.

We emphasize that the substantive content of the United Nations’ remedial program must be matched by a fair process for development of the program. Transparency and substantive participation of the persons most affected by the epidemic will both enhance the credibility and effectiveness of the United Nations’ response and affirm the dignity of the Haitian people. An effective process will further incorporate expert perspectives from the fields of public health and development and should respect the role of the government of Haiti.

We are writing to urge the United Nations to demonstrate that it is willing to move from evasion to accountability and from secrecy to transparency in responding to the cholera epidemic. The United Nations must seize the opportunity to chart a new course, restore its credibility and integrity, and finally bring this tragic chapter to a close.
Sincerely,

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