

Study: UN should be accountable for Haiti cholera (Update)

August 6 2013, by Trenton Daniel

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti should be held accountable for introducing cholera into the Caribbean nation, a Yale University report said Tuesday.

In the report "Peacekeeping Without Accountability," researchers from Yale Law School and the Yale School of Public Health said there is ample scientific evidence to show U.N. troops from Nepal inadvertently brought cholera to Haiti in October 2010. It said the world body should take responsibility.

The U.N. has said it enjoys legal immunity from such claims, and rejected an earlier effort by a Boston-based human rights group that sought compensation on behalf of a group of cholera victims who blamed peacekeepers for the outbreak.

The Yale report said the world body "violates obligations under international law by not providing a forum to address the grievances of cholera victims." By failing to hold itself accountable for causing Haiti's cholera outbreak, "the United Nations violates the very principles of accountability and respect for law that it promotes worldwide," it said.

Johan Peleman, the country director of the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said the study should be brought before the U.N. headquarters in New York.

"That's for New York to deal with," Peleman said by phone. "The reality

on the ground is we need money to respond" to the cholera outbreak.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced in December a \$2.27 billion initiative to help eradicate cholera in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share the island of Hispaniola, but the ambitious 10-year plan remains mostly unfunded.

Several scientific papers have suggested that cholera was introduced to Haiti shortly after a battalion from Nepal arrived. The disease is endemic in Nepal. A local contractor failed to properly sanitize the waste of a U.N. base, and the bacteria leaked into a tributary of one of Haiti's biggest rivers, according to one study.

Health officials say Haiti's cholera outbreak has since killed more than 7,500 people and sickened 578,409 others.

The Yale study said the U.N. has promised to set up a standing claims commission under agreements signed with the Haitian government, but has never honored this obligation in Haiti. Nor, it said, has it done so "anywhere else in the world, despite having entered into 32 such agreements since 1990."

"As a result, a meaningful mechanism to ensure peacekeeper accountability has been rendered a nullity," the report said.

The report calls for a claims commission, a public apology, support for victims and adequate funding for the prevention and treatment of cholera.

The U.N. peacekeeping mission arrived in Haiti in 2004 following the violent ouster of then President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Also Tuesday, the U.N. mission in Haiti and the Haitian government

renewed an appeal to fund the Humanitarian Action Plan, which is meant to help nearly 2 million Haitians vulnerable to cholera, hunger and natural disasters. This effort is seeking \$39 million in emergency donations.

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