

## UN chief in Haiti launches sanitation program (Update)

July 14 2014, by Pierre-Richard Luxama

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U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon greets residents during the launching of sanitation campaign in Hinche, Haiti, Monday, July 14, 2014. The Secretary-General arrived in rural Haiti on Monday to help launch a program to improve sanitation and fight the spread of cholera, a disease that many Haitians blame U.N. peacekeepers for introducing to the impoverished Caribbean country. ( AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited rural Haiti on Monday to help launch a program to improve sanitation and fight the spread of

cholera, a disease many Haitians blame U.N. peacekeepers for introducing to the impoverished Caribbean country.

An outbreak of the disease that followed Haiti's devastating earthquake in 2010 has killed more than 8,500 people and sickened about 700,000. Studies have shown cholera-infected waste likely was inadvertently introduced in one of Haiti's biggest rivers by troops from Nepal, where the disease is endemic.

The outbreak is the subject of three lawsuits in U.S. courts, including one filed this year by nearly 1,500 Haitians seeking compensation from the U.N. A previous claim by cholera victims was rejected by Ban and the U.N., which cited diplomatic immunity.

At a church service in the village of Los Palmas, Ban said that he knew the cholera epidemic "caused much anger and fear" in Haiti and that the disease "continues to affect an unacceptable number of people."

"As secretary-general of the United Nations, I want to assure you that the United Nations and its partners are strongly committed to ending the epidemic as quickly as possible," he said.

In 2012, Ban announced a \$2.2 billion initiative to help eradicate cholera in Hispaniola, the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But the program has not attracted nearly enough foreign donors.



U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, center wearing blue cap, greets residents during the launching of sanitation campaign in Hinche, Haiti, Monday, July 14, 2014. The Secretary-General arrived in rural Haiti on Monday to help launch a program to improve sanitation and fight the spread of cholera, a disease that many Haitians blame U.N. peacekeepers for introducing to the impoverished Caribbean country. ( AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery)

Ban's visit was criticized by some in Haiti who said the U.N. must accept responsibility for introducing the disease and provide compensation to families.

"It is an insult to all Haitians for the secretary-general to come to Haiti for a photo-op when he refuses to take responsibility for the thousands of Haitians killed and the hundreds of thousands sickened by the U.N. cholera epidemic," said Mario Joseph, a leading lawyer for Haitian cholera victims.

On Monday, Ban and Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe launched an initiative dubbed "Total Sanitation" aimed at boosting sanitation and hygiene in rural areas. Most of Haiti's 10 million people have no access to bathrooms, giving the country the worst sanitation access in the Western Hemisphere and providing fertile ground for cholera.

Later in the capital, Ban met with President Michel Martelly and discussed Haiti's upcoming legislative and municipal elections, among other topics.

An accord setting Oct. 26 as election day has not been authorized by the Senate, where a group of Martelly opponents argue it is unconstitutional.

Ban said he was encouraged by Martelly's "strong commitment" to holding the long-delayed elections in October, but expressed some concern there was still disagreement between the executive and legislative branches.

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