

Haiti's killer cholera epidemic could end this year: UN

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Haiti's killer cholera epidemic could be over this year, the United Nation's children's fund said on Friday, as the number of cases declines following the world's most virulent outbreak in modern times.

Roughly 100 suspected [cases](#) were recorded in January, which is the lowest level since the [epidemic](#) began in October 2010, and there was no explosion of cases last year even during the [rainy season](#).

"It's possible to eliminate [cholera](#) this year," said Marc Vincent, UNICEF's representative in the impoverished Caribbean nation.

"It's now or never and it's an opportunity that should not be missed," he told AFP.

About 10,000 people have died since the epidemic began. It was introduced by infected Nepalese UN peacekeepers sent to Haiti after the country's devastating 2010 earthquake.

"We have asked the government to gather all partners to see how we could really benefit from this historic moment to reach elimination," Vincent said, expressing hope for a rapid response from Haitian authorities.

During the epidemic Haiti has recorded more than 800,000 cases of cholera, an acute diarrheal infection caused by contaminated food or water.

Haiti's poor sanitation helped the disease spread. Even now, more than half of rural residents lack access to potable water and only one-quarter of Haitians have access to toilets.

Vincent praised the work of Haitian rapid response teams fighting the disease and "who are committed because they want to eliminate cholera themselves. They do that for their children, for their community."

But funding of these local efforts is only assured for the next six months.

"Our worry is that, if financing for these teams does not continue until the last case of cholera, we risk having then another outbreak, an explosion of cases," he said.

In December 2016, then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon apologized for the first time to Haitians for the role played by UN peacekeepers in sparking the epidemic.

The UN also hoped for \$400 million over two years to battle the disease, but only 10 percent of that amount has been provided by UN member states.

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