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Secretary-General Apologizes for United Nations Role in Haiti Cholera Epidemic, Urges International Funding of New Response to Disease

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks to the General Assembly on a new approach to address cholera in Haiti, in New York today:

Thank you for coming together today in a spirit of solidarity, respect and support for the people of Haiti. Let me begin by congratulating the people of Haiti for the peaceful conduct of the recent elections, the preliminary results of which were announced earlier this week.

I urge all candidates and their supporters to settle any disagreements through the appropriate legal channels. I commend all Haitians on this important milestone for their country's stability and democracy.

The Haitian people have faced enormous hardships and obstacles over the years: endemic poverty; political instability; and, of course, the devastating earthquake of 2010. The cholera epidemic that soon followed added a deeper layer of tragedy and suffering. Most recently this was compounded by the horrendous hurricane that put the country under new serious strains.

Over the last six years, cholera has afflicted nearly 800,000 people and claimed the lives of more than 9,000 Haitians. I travelled to Haiti to meet affected families. It was one of the most difficult journeys I have made as Secretary-General. I heard stories of families who suffered, breadwinners who were lost, daughters and sons who are gone forever. As a father and grandfather, I felt tremendous heartache at the pain so many families have had to endure. I will never forget it.

There are no easy answers to our challenges in Haiti. There are no perfect solutions. But that must not deter us from doing our utmost to respond. In my address to the General Assembly on 20 September, I expressed tremendous regret and sorrow at the profound suffering of Haitians affected by cholera. I said that it was time for a new United Nations approach to ease the plight of the Haitian people and to better their lives.

I have come before you today to present the elements of that new approach and seek your support. If you will permit me, I would like to deliver the following lines in French and then English. But I want to begin with a message directly to the Haitian people, and so I will begin in Creole.

Jodi a map di pèp ayisyen: Onè. Respè. Nou pran gwo lapenn. Poutet kantite moun ki pèdi lavi yo nan kolera, ak kantite soufrans maladi a mennen nan peyi Dayiti. Nan non Nasyon Zini, mwen vle di aklè: nap mandé pèp ayisyen padon. Nou pat fè ase lè maladi kolera a rive, epi lè li blayi nan péyi a. Nou regrèt anpil.

I will repeat in French: *Laissez-moi, à ce stade, m'adresser directement au peuple haïtien: Les Nations unies regrettent profondément les pertes en vies humaines et les souffrances causées par l'épidémie de choléra. Au nom des Nations unies, je veux vous le dire très clairement: nous nous excusons auprès du peuple haïtien. Nous n'avons tout simplement pas fait assez concernant l'épidémie de choléra et sa propagation en Haïti. Nous sommes profondément désolés pour notre rôle.*

The United Nations deeply regrets the loss of life and suffering caused by the cholera outbreak in Haiti. On behalf of the United Nations, I want to say very clearly: we apologise to the Haitian people. We simply did not do enough with regard to the cholera outbreak and its spread in Haiti. We are profoundly sorry for our role.

This has cast a shadow upon the relationship between the United Nations and the people of Haiti. It is a blemish on the reputation of UN peacekeeping and the Organization world-wide. For the sake of the Haitian people, but also for the sake of the United Nations itself, we have a moral responsibility to act. And we have a collective responsibility to deliver.

In the wake of the cholera outbreak, the United Nations family provided emergency health and humanitarian assistance to reduce the incidence of the disease. Over the years, we mobilized resources and took concrete action. Thanks to concerted international and Haitian efforts, the overall incidence of the disease has been reduced by approximately 90 per cent since its peak in 2011.

But funding to sustain these efforts has proven difficult to secure. As a result, cholera continues to take a heavy toll on the Haitian people. Today, Haiti remains home to the highest number of cholera cases in the world. Already at the beginning of this year, we were

seeing a rise in cases. Then in October, Hurricane Matthew multiplied the challenge. I personally went to Haiti and saw the suffering and utter devastation.

The number of people suspected with cholera tripled as a result of the hurricane. Thankfully, that number is going down now as a result of determined action. Our new approach to Haiti and cholera is founded on and follows two tracks. The assistance requested amounts to around \$400 million over two years divided between Track One and Track Two.

Track One consists of a substantially intensified effort to respond to, and reduce, the incidence of cholera in Haiti. Haitians clearly have told us that eliminating cholera must be priority number one. We would like to see improvements in people's access to care and treatment when sick, while also addressing the longer-term issues of water, sanitation and health systems.

Work on Track One is [well] under way. The number of rapid response teams has increased from 32 in April to 88 today. When there are reports of new cases, these teams work to provide immediate care within 48 hours and prevent further transmission. In addition, vaccinations against cholera are being provided to people in vulnerable areas.

Last month, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) helped launch a massive vaccination campaign that reached some 729,000 people living in areas most affected by Hurricane Matthew. In total, more than 1.2 million people will soon have been vaccinated, with further vaccination campaigns on the way.

At the same time, we are intensifying support to the Haitian Government in building sound water, sanitation and health systems. This is the best long-term defence against cholera and other water-borne diseases. The World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations and others are working to expand access to water and sanitation for all Haitians over a 10- to 15-year horizon.

The World Bank has focused on small towns and rural areas most affected by cholera, committing \$50 million for water and sanitation projects in 2015-2016 and a further \$20 million next year. The Inter-American Development Bank has committed over \$95 million for water and sanitation in Haiti over the past six years – with an additional \$62 million planned for next year.

I want to warmly thank donors who have provided support for Track One through multiple channels. We hope that further contributions will become available soon. Several Member States have expressed serious and imminent interest in contributing to our Trust Fund. This effort also will contribute to advancing the Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular SDG [Sustainable Development Goal] 6 to ensure clean water and sanitation for all.

I keenly recognize the financial pressures that you face – indeed, that we all face. I understand the reaction of being overwhelmed by what seems to be a never-ending list of pressing humanitarian needs around the world. In Haiti’s case, the hurricane has brought added suffering and understandably diverted resources.

Yet, I want to stress that on the scale of global humanitarian and development needs, limited sums are required to eliminate cholera in Haiti. This mission is realistic and doable. Cholera is a treatable and preventable disease. It can be controlled and eliminated. What is standing in the way is adequate resources and means of delivery.

We have accomplished much. It would be tragic for our efforts to be derailed due to insufficient funding. It would be even worse to stand by and watch as more lives are lost and more families suffer. A fully resourced cholera response for 2016-2018 to support the Government’s mid-term plan would be a great step forward and ensure that our efforts to end the disease are not left to ebb and flow.

We cannot turn away from the task until the job is done. I count on all of you to see this effort through, [and] to continue and increase your support until cholera is defeated.

In addition to the forward-looking steps under Track One, our new approach includes a second track – Track 2 - that focuses specifically on those Haitians most directly affected by cholera, their families and communities.

We have been consulting with the Government of Haiti on both tracks and will be discussing all aspects of implementation with them. I am pleased that the Permanent Representative of Haiti will make the first statement from the floor today.

Track Two is a concrete expression of the regret of our Organization for the suffering so many Haitians have endured. On that basis, we propose to take a community approach that would provide a package of material assistance and support to those most severely impacted by cholera. The support would be based on priorities established in consultation with communities, victims and their families.

These consultations will continue into 2017 and can take place in earnest once the electoral process in Haiti is complete. This support could take many forms, including projects to alleviate the impacts of cholera and strengthen capacity to address the conditions that increase cholera risk. It could also include projects reflecting community needs not directly related to cholera, such as education grants, microfinance or other initiatives. These community projects and initiatives would be complementary and, to the extent possible, consistent with work under Track One.

Some have urged that the package also include an individual component, such as the payment of money to the families of those who died of cholera. This approach would require identification of the deceased individuals and their family members. It would also require the certainty of sufficient funding to provide a meaningful fixed amount per cholera death.

We need to do further on-the-ground consultations, while acknowledging the difficulties involved. Additional evaluation is needed on whether and how the limitations of information on deaths from cholera, including the identities of the victims, can be addressed and on the challenges and costs associated with that effort.

Whatever the eventual design of the package, a familiar obstacle once again stands in the way: adequate funding. We have clearly said that given humanitarian and development needs, funding for Track One needs to be prioritized. And it would be wrong for the Track Two effort to compete with voluntary funding for Track One.

We strongly encourage voluntary funding to both Tracks from Member States, which can be channelled through the newly established United Nations Haiti Cholera Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund. However, this is premised on the assumption that we will receive the required resources for Track Two through voluntary funding. Should such funding not materialize, other innovative, multi-funded solutions may need to be pursued.

At a time when so many United Nations values and principles are under threat, the Haiti cholera challenge represents an important test. It is a test of our commitment to the most vulnerable. It is a test of our long-standing relationship with the Haitian people.

It is a test of our ability to demonstrate compassion while preserving our ability to do good in many other places around the world. It is a test of our collective responsibility for the crucial endeavour of peacekeeping. I will not pretend that this new approach is without risks or difficulties.

Eliminating cholera from Haiti, and living up to our moral responsibility to those who have been most directly affected, will require the full commitment of the international community and, crucially, the resources necessary. With their history of suffering and hardships, the people of Haiti deserve this tangible expression of our solidarity.

The United Nations should seize this opportunity to address a tragedy that also has damaged our reputation and global mission. That criticism will persist unless we do what is right for those affected. In short, United Nations action requires Member State action.

Without your political will and financial support, we have only good intentions and words. Words are powerful — yes. Words are necessary - yes. But words cannot replace action and material support.

So many people have suffered grievously. The United Nations and its Member States have the power to recognize and respond to that suffering. Let us step up in solidarity to our moral duty and do the right thing for the Haitian people and our United Nations. Thank you.
Merci beaucoup. Merci anpil.