

Haiti cholera victims demand major UN compensation - Tehran Times

Health Desk

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Five thousand cholera victims in Haiti have launched legal action demanding hundreds of millions of dollars in damages from the United Nations for an epidemic widely blamed on UN peacekeepers, lawyers said Tuesday.

The epidemic has killed 6,600 people and infected about 475,000 since it erupted one year ago. Several studies have indicated the cholera was introduced by Nepalese peacekeepers and lawyers acting for the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti have filed a legal claim demanding \$100,000 dollars for each death and \$50,000 for each person made sick.

The group said it is already acting for 5,000 people made sick or families of the dead and has threatened a full court case if the UN does not give compensation.

"The cholera outbreak is directly attributable to the negligence, gross negligence, recklessness and deliberate indifference for the health and lives of Haiti's citizens by the United Nations," says the group's petition.

The group said the United Nations tried to cover up the cause of the cholera outbreak until an independent panel of experts released a report in May.

The institute said the legal petition was sent to the UN headquarters and the UN mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, this month.

UN spokesman Martin Nesirky confirmed that the demand was received on Friday. "It will be looked at by the relevant parts of the UN system," he told reporters.

The UN was working "to do everything possible to bring the spread of cholera under control, to treat and support those affected by cholera and ultimately to eradicate cholera from Haiti," he said.

A panel of international health experts appointed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in their report that the source of the epidemic was "debatable"

But they said evidence "overwhelmingly supports" the conclusion that the Haiti epidemic was due to the contamination of a river near the Nepalese camp "with a pathogenic strain of current South Asian type" of cholera.

It called on the United Nations to change the way it handles peacekeepers' health.

Studies by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other leading experts have said that the peacekeepers based at a camp at Mirebalais in northern Haiti brought the strain of cholera into the country.

Brian Concannon, IJDH director, said: "The majority of the petition's facts come from UN reports. The UN developed much of the law we cite. Our clients are challenging the institution to act consistently with what it knows to be true and just."

"It is time for the UN to step up and do the right thing," Concannon, a lawyer, told a press

conference at the UN headquarters.

He said that if the United Nations does not give compensation, his group, which has been operating in Haiti for about seven years, would start civil action in Haiti.

The institute said that the UN had not even set up a special commission to handle complaints as it was meant to do under its operating accord in Haiti.

The World Health Organization predicted last month that the number of cases would hit 500,000 by the end of the year.

(Source: AFP)