



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on December 8, 2010

UN Likely Caused Cholera Epidemic in Haiti

The United Nations has been guilty over the decades of plenty of criminal and otherwise destructive acts, but causing a deadly epidemic hasn't been one of them — until now. The cholera epidemic sweeping across Haiti, which has claimed more than 2,000 lives so far, adding the misery of disease to a country already ravaged this year by one of the most destructive earthquakes in human history, was probably caused by careless sanitation at a UN camp housing Nepalese soldiers, according to a report just released by French epidemiologist Renaud Piarroux.



Piarroux's report, commissioned by the French government at Haiti's request to uncover the source of the cholera, concluded, according to Jonathan Katz of the Associated Press, that "there was no doubt that the cholera originated in contaminated water next to a U.N. base outside the town of Mirebalais along a tributary to Haiti's Artibonite river." In the language of the report, which has not yet been made public, but which Katz was given access to, "no other hypothesis could be found to explain the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in this village ... not affected by the earthquake earlier this year and located dozens of kilometers from the coast and (quake refugee tent) camps."

The Haitian people, however, have been well aware for some time of the source of the cholera, and even rioted for a week in protest of the UN Nepalese troops and the lack of sanitation at their facility.

Now that the cause of the epidemic has been pinpointed, it remains to be seen whether the United Nations will accept the blame for this latest outrage. So far, the United Nations has stoutly denied all responsibility for the epidemic. On Tuesday, UN mission spokesman Vincenzo Pugliese tried to cast doubt on Piarroux's report. "We have neither accepted nor dismissed his findings, as it's one report among others," he said. "The Nepalese contingent in Mirebalais is just one piece of the cholera puzzle, since there is no conclusive evidence at this point that the Nepalese camp was or was not the source of the epidemic."

No evidence? The Nepalese have admitted to replacing pipes leaking a foul-smelling effluent, and no less an authority than the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed that the cholera bacteria in the Haitian outbreak is the same strain as that found in South Asia. But the United Nations has refused to admit any possibility of blame for the epidemic, trying to deflect responsibility by insisting that it is, in Katz' words, "more important to focus on fighting the outbreak than on its origin."

The United Nations may have a hard time keeping the lid on this one, though; according to its own calculations, the cholera epidemic may end up infecting upwards of 600,000 Haitians — a monumental tragedy visited on an already desperate people, that the UN will add to its already severely tarnished résumé.

Photo of cholera victim: AP Images



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