

HAITI UNDER MILITARY OCCUPATION. Haitians Want MINUSTAH to Leave and Compensate Victims of Cholera

By [Global Research](#)

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On February 13, a high-level delegation from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) [arrived in Haiti to review UN activities there](#), in particular the work carried out by the Stabilization Mission in Haiti, or [MINUSTAH](#). The UN Secretary General, the U.S. government and other international actors have consistently sought to paint the military mission in a positive light, praising, [in the words of U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice](#), its “critical role in improving stability and governance in Haiti and in creating the conditions for security, reconstruction and development.”

But this position has become increasingly untenable, as [an increasing number of reports of alleged abuses by UN troops](#), including [various incidents of rape](#) and [violent attacks](#) against unarmed Haitians, have come to light. UN soldiers are also widely considered to be [responsible for introducing cholera to Haiti](#), an epidemic that has killed over 7000 people and infected over half a million, according to conservative estimates.

A [newly published survey on popular perceptions of MINUSTAH](#) in Port-au-Prince confirms that MINUSTAH is viewed negatively by residents of the nation’s capital. The survey team, under the leadership of CUNY anthropologist Dr. Mark Schuller, interviewed members of 800 households in various neighborhoods of the city, from both low and mixed income areas.

Only 24.2% of respondents considered that MINUSTAH’s presence was “a good thing” and a majority indicated that, for the most part, they didn’t feel more secure when in close proximity to a U.N. soldier. To the question “when should MINUSTAH leave the country?”, 72.2% of those who expressed an opinion thought that MINUSTAH should leave either now, within six months or within a year. Only 5.9% stated that they thought MINUSTAH should not leave.

Another question in the survey asked whether respondents believed that MINUSTAH owes some form of restitution to cholera victims. (As we’ve [discussed before](#), numerous independent scientific studies have shown that MINUSTAH troops from Nepal are very likely responsible for introducing a devastating cholera epidemic to Haiti in October of 2010.) An overwhelming 74.5% of those surveyed considered that MINUSTAH should offer compensation, while only 4.9% opposed the idea (the rest of those surveyed said they didn’t know). As Schuller noted in the report:

This survey question and the responses that it generated raise the larger issue of MINUSTAH's accountability before the law and the people of Haiti. Haitians and human rights organizations have expressed their concern over the fact that MINUSTAH operates in Haiti with very little legal accountability for their criminal conduct. Under a Status of Forces Agreement (or SOFA) that the Haitian government signed with the UN, MINUSTAH troops enjoy an almost blanket waiver of liability in Haitian courts for any crimes they commit in Haiti. Both military and civil members enjoy immunity for all acts performed in their official capacity. MINUSTAH military members who commit a crime outside of "their official capacity" are only subject to their home country's jurisdiction. Civilian members can only be prosecuted if the UN agrees. Haitians may not seek damages for civil liability in a Haitian court unless the UN certifies that the charges are unrelated to the member's official duties.

The Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti and the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI) are representing over 5,000 cholera victims seeking justice from the UN. In a press release Monday, the [groups called on the Security Council delegation](#) to "evaluate the cost of the UN's failure to take responsibility for the epidemic of cholera introduced by troops from the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), in terms of Haitian lives lost and damage to the UN's reputation." Mario Joseph, BAI Managing Attorney said:

"Security Council members should talk to cholera victims — young children who lost their parents, families who spent all they had on medical treatment and burials, communities decimated by the disease. I am confident that if they see the cost of the UN cholera on the Haitian people, they will do what they need to do to provide the clean water infrastructure necessary to control the epidemic. If they do not, the killing will go on and on."

When asked about allegations of abuses by MINUSTAH forces, Ambassador Susan Rice told the press that "The UN has been very clear that it takes all these allegations very seriously. We support them in that. They have to be thoroughly investigated and justice and accountability must be done. And we will be very plain and clear-eyed as we assess what the challenges are and where improvements are needed..."

Nevertheless, despite the mounting evidence of abuses, there have been no convictions of UN soldiers to date. Last year, five Uruguayan soldiers caught on video apparently raping a teenage boy were repatriated and jailed – but then [released in January](#). The Haitian senate has passed a [resolution calling for UN immunity to be lifted](#) in cases of abuse, yet that would still require the UN to change current policy. As the UN's independent human rights expert, Michael Forst [declared last week](#) concerning MINUSTAH, "Immunity doesn't mean impunity." Despite Susan Rice's fervent affirmations, it appears that for UN soldiers who continue to commit abuses, immunity does mean impunity.

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