

UN Praises Cuba for Haiti Cholera Response



Port au Prince, February 20 (RHC-teleSUR) -- The United Nations' top anti-cholera official in Haiti praised Cuba Thursday for its role in battling the deadly disease.

“We hope ... the Cuban example is followed (by other nations), as an example capable of saving so many Haitian lives, despite economic constraints and other difficulties,” said Assistant Secretary-General Pedro Medrano Rojas. Rojas is the U.N.'s senior coordinator for cholera response in Haiti.

According to the U.N. official, Cuban medical workers have been on the frontlines of Haiti's cholera epidemic, playing a major role in treating and preventing the disease.

Rojas stated he plans to visit Havana later this month to meet with Cuban health authorities.

“We want to recognize the extraordinary and heroic work of the Cuban medical brigade in Haiti, which has saved thousands of lives, as well as explore other possibilities for collaboration,” Rojas told Cuban media.

He is also expected to meet with the Cuban developers of an oral cholera vaccine. The vaccine is being developed by state-owned pharmaceutical company BioCubaFarma, which says its formula will be more effective than current vaccines when it is released in 2015.

Although cholera isn't a major health concern in Cuba, the disease has been ravaging Haiti since 2010.

The outbreak has been linked to Nepalese U.N. peacekeepers. An estimated 700,000 have contracted cholera since 2010 – 6 percent of Haiti's population.

Around 8,000 people died from the epidemic, which today is widely viewed as the worst cholera outbreak in recent history.

Although the epidemic is likely receding, thousands of new cases of the disease are reported every month.

The U.N. has vowed to help curb the outbreak, but has refused to accept legal responsibility. In 2013, a group of Haitians launched a class action lawsuit demanding the U.N. provide compensation to cholera victims. The lawsuit was quashed by a U.S. federal court in January.

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