

**Statement of Ambassador Tracey Jacobson,
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International Organization Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on an issue that demands urgent, meaningful, and sustained action. Sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers is a cancer that demands the most comprehensive treatment possible, and while our collective outrage is well justified, that outrage is only useful if it is paired with action.

As you know well, in early March UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon released his annual report on SEA detailing a shocking number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN civilian and uniformed personnel in 2015 alone. While we welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to improve transparency on these matters, the report also illuminates an important truth – that the steps the UN and its member states were taking to address this crisis were falling far short of the need.

However, we believe certain recent actions taken by the UN not only reflect a new seriousness, but also create important new avenues for member state engagement.

For example, we're watching closely the Secretary-General's efforts aimed at strengthening the UN system's capacity to respond. These include steps to leverage the international presence in any post-conflict environment, improve reporting systems for victims and communities, the creation of immediate response teams to gather and preserve evidence for use in investigations, suspending reimbursement to troop- and police- contributing countries for uniformed personnel who are sent home for alleged misconduct, and the establishment of sexual exploitation and abuse taskforces in UN peace operations.

I will also note that in February the Secretary-General took the groundbreaking action of repatriating an entire contingent of peacekeepers from the Democratic Republic of Congo from the UN peacekeeping mission in Central African Republic largely due to credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. This contingent was replaced by troops from another country. Although this was the first time the Secretary-General had taken such a step, it sets an important precedent and we believe it sends a strong message to other troop and police contributing countries.

And we particularly welcome the Secretary-General's action to begin identifying the nationality of military and police personnel alleged to have committed sexual exploitation and abuse as well as judicial or administrative actions taken by their governments.

This is an important step. Troop and police contributing countries are responsible for the discipline of their personnel. Public identification can motivate countries unwilling to take appropriate steps to prevent and respond to SEA to change the way they do business.

Transparency can also help to identify which countries may require further capacity building, including training to prevent SEA, to investigate and prosecute criminal SEA in their national military and civilian justice systems, and general professionalization. As importantly, the identification of countries will also allow Member States to identify serious patterns of misconduct, so that we can use our diplomatic muscle to urge the UN to repatriate units and contingents and when necessary suspend these countries from contributing uniformed personnel until they can demonstrate they have taken adequate corrective actions.

According to the Secretary General's annual report released in March, there were 69 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions from 21* countries in 2015. Since then, there have been additional reported instances in 2015 and 2016 – we know this because in another welcome development, the UN has started posting allegations in near-real time on their website.

Although the State Department and our mission to the UN in New York have a long track record of using diplomatic engagement to jolt the UN and troop and police contributing countries into action on this issue, this new level of information has allowed the United States to focus our efforts where most needed. Last month we launched an effort to approach all the countries on the UN's list at senior government levels to accomplish three goals:

First, to ensure their full awareness of the report and allegations. Second, to seek their firm commitment to investigate credibly and hold those found responsible to account, including through prosecution where appropriate when crimes have been committed. And third, to discuss potential areas of cooperation where the United States might support improved capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes involving SEA.

Our ongoing effort includes asking other countries to be similarly engaged with troop and police contributing countries.

I will also note that the Secretary-General's report detailed allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by civilian personnel serving in other UN entities. Based on that reporting, we have approached relevant UN agencies to ensure they are taking needed action.

Mr. Chairman, any instance of sexual exploitation and abuse does very real damage to the credibility of the institution of peacekeeping – a tool that has never been more important to global peace and security, and upon which the U.S. relies to stabilize conflicts that might otherwise spiral out of control.

It is our goal to bring these practices to a definitive end in order to ensure UN peacekeeping remains an available, effective tool – and one that operates to the highest standards of professionalism, capacity, and conduct.

It is exactly that goal that prompted the President to host the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping at last year's UN General Assembly and to issue a new Presidential Memorandum reaffirming our strong support for UN peace operations and directing new actions to strengthen and modernize these operations.

These efforts are well-timed to bolster action on sexual exploitation and abuse. For example, the Leaders' Summit resulted in commitments from more than fifty countries of nearly 150 new military and police contributions to UN peacekeeping, amounting to more than 40,000 troops and police.

We are pushing pledging countries to realize these new commitments, which will send a message to other troop and police contributing countries that this is no longer a seller's market. New capacities should allow the UN to prioritize better performing troops and police for deployment if a new mission is stood-up or if new gaps arise in existing missions, and they provide the UN with flexibility to replace contingents potentially withdrawn for misconduct.

The Presidential Policy Memorandum has changed the way the interagency works on peacekeeping. In the six months since it has been issued, the State Department and the Department of Defense have begun to work more closely and collaboratively on UN peacekeeping.

Although the U.S. Mission to the UN takes the lead on diplomacy and outreach in New York, the interagency contributes to their strategies and we send interagency delegations to New York to deliver clear messages about the actions that should be taken by the Secretariat and by the Permanent Missions to prevent and respond to SEA. Our colleagues in the bureaus for African Affairs, Political-Military Affairs, and International Narcotic and Law Enforcement work in partnership with the Department of Defense (DoD) to take the lead on strengthening U.S. peacekeeping capacity-building programs, but we all contribute to important aspects of their planning.

At State, we continue to do targeted outreach through posts and in multilateral dialogues, often with DoD standing alongside, to deliver tough messages and requests on performance and SEA. We are leveraging all of our tools, and by doing it jointly we have greater impact. The current nature and intensity of interagency collaboration on UN peacekeeping reform is unprecedented and we will continue to focus our efforts to improve peacekeeper performance, including ending the current scourge of SEA.

Mr. Chairman, my colleagues with me today from the U.S. Mission to the UN and from the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs are well-placed to flesh out their efforts to promote oversight and reform, training, capacity-building, etc.

I will conclude by noting that by their very mandates, the vast majority of UN peace operations are intended to protect civilians under threat of physical violence. Exploiting or abusing these same vulnerable people is appalling and an inexcusable breach of trust, and we greatly appreciate this Committee's attention to the issue.

* Burundi, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Morocco, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Benin, South Africa, Tanzania, Slovakia, Niger, Moldova, Togo, Canada, Rwanda, Madagascar, Senegal, Ghana, and Germany.