

OPENING STATEMENT

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Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing

“Do No Harm: Ending Sexual Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Cardin for inviting me to appear before the committee today.

I serve as President of the Better World Campaign, which works to promote a stronger relationship between the U.S. and the UN.

As the previous witnesses have made clear, there is a cancer within the United Nations – and it must be cut out. The scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN Peacekeepers continues, despite Secretary General Ban’s commitment to a zero-tolerance policy and repeated promises from UN Member States to take meaningful action.

The victims of this abuse are real. And the consequences are as well. Just two weeks ago, a 16-year old girl was allegedly raped by a peacekeeper from DR Congo in a hotel room.

What a sickening violation not only of an innocent girl, but the trust placed in that peacekeeper by the UN and the military that sent him to help the people of the Central African Republic.

Hearing the horrendous reports emanating from CAR, it would be natural to want to withdraw all UN peacekeepers before more damage can be done. But this basic instinct to protect needs to be balanced against the good that peacekeepers continue to do there.

The UN mission has played a critical role in the conduct of free, democratic elections, which has led to the swearing-in of a new legitimate President committed to rebuilding the war-torn country, and to successful legislative elections which just concluded a few weeks ago.

Since 2014, peacekeepers have trained nearly 200,000 children on avoidance of unexploded ordinance – a macabre gift left by warring factions in CAR.

As a result, Human Rights Watch issued a report which indicated that the more than 12,000 UN Peacekeepers in CAR will be critical to disarming rebel factions and re-establishing security.

So the question is: how do we support the vital work being done by UN peacekeepers in CAR and elsewhere, and at the same time, implement meaningful steps to stop sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and ensure justice for victims like the 16 year old girl in the hotel room?

If the UN is to root out the bad actors – whether they hail from France or the developing world militaries that are backbone of UN peacekeeping -- it must show that the new policies just

announced by the UN and endorsed by the Security Council will be implemented with unshakable resolve.

The “name and shame” list issued by the Secretary-General of countries charged with sexual exploitation and abuse is groundbreaking. For the first time in the history of UN peacekeeping, transparency is now, at last, at the core of the UN’s response to SEA. Secretary-General Ban has suspended payments to troop-contributing countries wherever there is a credible allegation against one of its troops. He has repatriated entire military contingents to their home countries where there was evidence of widespread and systematic abuse – again, a first. Though long overdue, these actions are the right course.

Even so, and even though they are endorsed by the Security Council, these measures will mean nothing unless they are actively and consistently enforced -- a posture which will anger some troop contributing countries. Sending home offending contingents is not only a black eye on the global stage, but a loss in important compensation to that contributing nation.

And for those countries where there is evidence of widespread or systemic sexual exploitation and abuse, they should be blocked from joining new missions. The UN must say NO on deployment until demonstrable progress is made. The Secretary-General has the power to do that – he must wield it, and the Security Council must back him.

There are certain to be consequences. One year from now, for example, the Security Council may choose to intervene in a country facing a crisis. With lives on the line, the international community will look to the UN to quickly deploy peacekeepers. Only a few countries will offer troops, and of those, some will have checkered human rights records. While there will be justifiable demands to deploy a robust force, the UN must hold firm and reject any nation with a record of widespread or systemic abuse.

At the same time, this does not mean that the international community should accept a weak response to conflict and mass atrocities. Rather, we must demand that more countries shoulder the load and do so in an ethical and principled way.

As it stands, there is a severe shortage of well-trained troops for a growing number of increasingly complex, dangerous missions. The dramatic increase in the size and scope of peacekeeping missions approved by the UN Security Council, together with the near-withdrawal from peacekeeping by European and American forces, has taxed the ability of the UN to recruit the best trained and equipped troops. If peacekeeping is to ultimately free itself from the stain of sexual abuse, the responsibility must not sit with UN alone; other member states need to answer the call.

To its credit, the United States took some decisive steps to improve this dynamic in chairing a United Nations peacekeeping summit last fall. The Summit resulted in pledges of 40,000 more peacekeepers from a diverse pool of countries. Ensuring those pledges materialize and that troops deploy to places like CAR and Mali will be instrumental in backing up the UN’s denial of certain countries over their records on sexual exploitation and abuse.

But more can and must be done on training, investigative support, and vetting. A few suggestions:

- The State Department's Global Peace Operations Initiative has trained over 200,000 peacekeeping troops since 2005. The U.S. should enhance the sexual abuse and command and control components of GPOI across all of its peacekeeping training centers.
- The U.S. and other countries should use both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to push troop contributing countries to take disciplinary action against soldiers proven to engage in sexual exploitation and abuse. DR Congo is currently trying 3 of 21 of its peacekeepers, with more trials over the next several months. Sadly, that's the exception rather than the rule in terms of justice.
- To investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, the UN has established two different mechanisms in conjunction with troop contributing countries. The UN must ensure that these investigation teams are fully trained, better coordinated, and have the ability to not only interview victims, but refer them to medical and psycho-social help and access to legal counsel so they can seek justice.
- The UN currently has a rudimentary database for vetting personnel to make sure that those who have been kicked out of missions cannot return. As a country with a wealth of expertise in computing, the U.S. could help advance progress and improve the technology, possibly by harnessing the talent of the private sector.

In conclusion, it is shameful that it took the high-profile sexual exploitation and abuse cases in CAR to grab the world's attention to this crisis and to pull open the curtain to the culture of impunity which exists in UN peacekeeping. The UN and members of the Security Council are now seized with developing and implementing solutions to this crisis. But we need to be invested over the long-haul – in getting more peacekeeping troops into the system so the UN doesn't deploy the wrong troops to a crisis; in ensuring that allegations are fully investigated and justice is served by the countries who contributed the troops; and in providing victims and their families with the help they so desperately need.

We have to make it right because we have no other choice.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.