

**Jordie Hannum**  
**Senior Director, Better World Campaign**  
**House Committee on Foreign Affairs - Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations**  
*Peacekeepers: Allegations of Abuse and Absence of Accountability at the United Nations*  
**Apr 13, 2016**

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

As your Subcommittee knows and as some of the witnesses have outlined, there is a “cancer” within the United Nations, namely sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers.

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

What a sickening violation, not only of an innocent girl, but also of 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 demand withdrawal of 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 in CAR has played a critical role in reducing ethnic violence, facilitating democratic elections, and fostering the highest economic growth in fifteen years.

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?

If the UN is to root out the bad actors – whether they hail from the developed or developing world – it must show that the newly announced policies, endorsed by the Security Council, will be implemented with unshakable resolve.

This month, the Secretary-General took dramatic steps around greater transparency, “naming and shaming” the nations whose troops are accused of abuses. He has also kicked out an entire military contingent over evidence of widespread and systematic abuse – again, a first. Though long overdue, these actions are the right course.

Even so, these measures will mean nothing unless they are actively and consistently enforced -- a posture which will anger some troop contributing countries. That is in part because sexual exploitation and abuse plagues militaries around the globe, with countries like the U.S. and multilateral organizations like NATO experiencing their own decades-long struggles. Yet, more notably, it is because sending home offending contingents is not only a black eye on the global stage, but a loss in important revenue to that contributing nation.

Further, we argue that for those countries where there is evidence of widespread abuse, they should also 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.

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.

As it stands, there is a 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 address sexual abuse, the responsibility must not sit with UN alone; other member states need to answer the bell. The United States, in particular, can play an important role in the areas of discipline, training, investigative support and vetting personnel.

The United States should use both bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to push troop contributing countries to take greater disciplinary action against soldiers proven to engage in sexual exploitation and abuse. As was noted in the Secretary-General's March report, out of 69 allegations in 2015, in only 22 instances were investigations completed by January 31, 2016. And in only one of those cases did a country report to the UN that it had punished a perpetrator in response to a substantiated allegation.

With respect to training - while in of itself, it's not a magic bullet, as we saw with the well trained French forces in CAR - it is an important element to professionalization, and the United States is well-suited to assist. For years, the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), a State Department-run security assistance program, has provided training for over 200,000 peacekeeping troops from a variety of countries. Specifically, the U.S. should enhance the sexual abuse related component of GPOI across all of its peacekeeper training centers. The U.S. could also consider bilateral incentives and pressure i.e. either augmenting or suspending GPOI assistance to countries that either showed marked improvement and those that do not.

In terms of aiding investigations, member states understandably feel strongly about investigating their own citizens. That being said, we should work with the UN to consider the feasibility of having an outside body accompany and monitor all national investigative teams. At the very least, the U.S. should work with the UN to ensure that every peacekeeping mission has a team, either nationally based or from the UN, who can deploy immediately after a substantiated allegation, and that the team has a certain level of training, based on internationally recognized standards. Specifically, these teams should understand the risks involved in investigating SEA cases and ensure that survivors and witnesses are willingly involved in the investigation process and have been properly informed of their rights. To help fill potential gaps, the U.S. should consider deploying its own personnel to help support investigations when allegations of SEA arise, or consider using bilateral rule of law/governance training initiatives already in place to help prepare troop and police-contributing countries to properly investigate.

In terms of improved vetting, the UN currently has a rudimentary database for vetting personnel to make sure that those who have been kicked out of missions, cannot return. Given that there are now more than 100,000 personnel serving on UN peacekeeping missions—and these personnel rotate out on an annual basis—this is a massive task, compounded by the fact that the technology underpinning the system itself, and the number of UN personnel dedicated to maintaining it, is not robust at the moment.

The U.S. could help advance progress and improve the technology by contributing technological equipment and expertise to the UN to help build out the capacity of the Misconduct Tracking System. The U.S. could also consider seconding U.S. personnel to the UN to support these efforts.

For some though, the steps outlined above are insufficient, as they believe UN peacekeeping is irreparably broken and the United States should either end or drastically reduce its funding and support. To that, I say that while the U.S. must demand reforms on abuse and exploitation, we must not lose sight of the overall importance of peacekeeping missions.

The UN currently oversees 16 peacekeeping operations with over 100,000 personnel, constituting the largest deployed military force in the world. Over the past several decades, both Republican and Democratic Administrations have used U.S. influence at the Council to support peacekeeping.

Peacekeeping has generated support because it can mean the difference between life and death in the places it deploys. A 2013 study by American and Swedish researchers found that deploying large numbers of UN peacekeepers “dramatically reduces civilian killings.” In South Sudan, UN forces are currently working to protect nearly 200,000 civilians who have fled a devastating two-year civil war. In the Central African Republic, Amnesty International released a report in February saying that with respect to the UN mission, the peacekeepers presence “has saved many lives and prevented much bloodshed.”

These missions are also cost-effective: According to a study by the GAO, UN peacekeeping operations are eight times less expensive than a comparable U.S. force. They are also manifestly in our interest. As Admiral Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under Presidents Bush and Obama, said: “[United Nations] peacekeepers help promote stability and help reduce the risks that major U.S. military interventions may be required. Therefore the success of these operations is very much in our national interest.”

Now it is true that the U.S. pays the largest portion of the UN’s peacekeeping budget, but the U.S. also has veto power over the size of that budget due to our presence on the UN Security Council. That special status also puts the U.S. in a unique position to push for peacekeeping reform.

I would further argue that we’re best able to pressure the UN for changes when we are fully engaged. Over the last seven years, Congress has admirably paid our dues without drama or delay. As a result, we have been able to move forward many important reforms at the UN. Of most relevance, in March, the United States championed and the UN endorsed Security Council Resolution 2272, which put in place the stringent new measures I’ve discussed to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. In addition, U.S. engagement at the UN has led to vital cost-cutting reforms, including reducing the cost per peacekeeper by 18% and the number of peacekeeping support staff by 3,000, along with major changes in how UN staff salaries are calculated.

Thus, if we are to eradicate the cancer within the UN right now, it is more important than ever that we remain fully and dutifully engaged. Only then can we ensure that this scourge of sexual abuse and exploitation can be eliminated.