

Sexual Exploitation Abuse in UN Peacekeeping

Written by Malaika Kambon ID2048
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Despite recent international attention to the problem, United Nations peacekeepers are still sexually exploiting and abusing women in the countries in which they serve, according to a report released yesterday by Refugees International. The report, "Must Boys Be Boys?," was prepared by Sarah Martin, who visited peacekeeping missions in Haiti and Liberia.

Refugees International charged today in a new report that a culture that tolerates sexual exploitation and abuse has evolved in UN peacekeeping missions. The report, *Must Boys Be Boys? Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions*, was released as part of a panel discussion co-hosted by the Permanent Mission of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations. Refugees International also urged the UN to insure that adequate funding and resources are available to address the problem.

His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Husseini of the Jordanian mission to the United Nations and Anna Shotton, the Focal Point for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) were also members of the panel and agreed that while the UN has made progress in addressing the problem, more can be done. The panel was moderated by H.E. Mr. Augustine Mahiga of Tanzania, Permanent Representative to the Mission of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations.

"A 'boys will be boys' attitude in peacekeeping missions breeds tolerance for exploiting and abusing local women. This attitude is slowly changing, but the UN must go beyond rhetoric and insure that the resources needed to change this culture are available," said Sarah Martin, Advocate for Refugees International and author of *Must Boys Be Boys?* "Sexual misconduct compromises peacekeepers' ability to transform conflict and bring about a stable peace."

Must Boys Be Boys? Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping Missions uses UN peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Haiti as an example and argues that a "hyper-masculine culture" has evolved that breeds a "wall of silence" that bonds together members to protect them from outside criticism. Even in countries where it is illegal, solicitation of prostitutes by men in post-conflict countries is treated as commonplace. Employees are reluctant to report sexual misconduct by colleagues due to fear of recrimination from within the system. UN employees confirm that many do not truly buy into the UN's official policy of zero tolerance and zero contact.

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“Until there is a better understanding of the zero contact rule, peacekeepers will continue to think of it as a rule that makes no sense. Fear of punishment is not enough to ensure compliance,” Martin said.

Liberians regularly complained to Refugees International about the problem. A Liberian man said in an interview, “This behavior would not be acceptable in the home country of these soldiers. Why are these soldiers playing around with our children?”

Anna Shotton pointed out at the briefing that the UN is committed to “zero-complacency and zero-impunity” for those found guilty of such acts and that this commitment is getting through to UN personnel.

“Tremendous progress has been made over the past year to drive home the UN’s message of zero-tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse,” Ms. Shotton stated. “However, the message has not gotten through to all peacekeeping personnel. Much remains to be done.”

His Royal Highness Prince Zeid Ra’ad Zeid al-Hussein, who released “A Comprehensive Strategy to Eliminate Future Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations” in February 2005 per the request of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, also participated in the briefing.

Must Boys Be Boys? describes Prince Zeid’s report as an honest and far-reaching account that makes bold recommendations to eliminate this problem. The new report builds on Prince Zeid’s findings and outlines a broad series of recommendations in the following six areas:

Systematically incorporating a gender perspective into all UN peacekeeping operations.

Changing attitudes of senior management in UN peacekeeping missions.

Focusing on problems with civilian personnel – a group who regularly has been overlooked.

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Using culturally-appropriate programs that are developed with women's organizations to train peacekeeping troops and monitor and evaluate training results.

Improving access to the UN complaint system so that local women know who to reach out to when a problem occurs and understand that their complaint will be taken seriously.

Empowering women in local communities so that they have a means to support themselves beyond commercial sex work.

"The UN must support peacekeeping troops and implement these recommendations. Given the right tools, effective peacekeeping operations can bring about a stable peace so that displaced people can return home and societies can begin to rebuild," Martin concluded. "Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse cast a dark shadow over the positive impacts that UN peacekeepers have made and compromise their mission to secure the peace."

Refugees International is a 26-year-old advocacy organization that generates lifesaving humanitarian assistance and protection for displaced people around the world, and works to end the conditions that create displacement.

Refugees International's report, *Must Boys Be Boys?*, is available [HERE](#) .