

**BAND-AIDING A BULLET WOUND: UN POLICY ON SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND
ABUSE OFFENSES**

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Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) offenses by UN peacekeepers have become a prominent and ill-addressed issue over the last decade. Since 2007, there have been 853 allegations by civilians against UN peacekeepers with 136 of those allegations being substantiated after investigation.¹ After seeing a drop in reported allegations after 2009 from 112 offenses, 2016 was a 7-year high for reported allegations reaching 103.² Despite combative efforts, SEA offenses reported in Haiti in April 2017 revealed 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers found operating a child sex ring.³

The endemic nature of SEA offenses prompted me to interview key non-governmental security officials in Geneva. The dominant academic narrative is that sovereignty rights impede the UN from prosecuting peacekeepers committing such crimes. However, my research shows that the failure to eradicate SEA can also be blamed on policy development and implementation regarding peacekeeper/community awareness, combative measures, and prosecution. There is either an absence of effective policy altogether, or an absence of institutional mechanisms to aid implementation.

Common narratives make it seem like SEA offenses only affect peacekeeper-civilian relations. However, a 2012 statistic indicated that female peacekeepers were fifteen-times more likely to be raped by a comrade than an enemy.⁴ Despite the greater inclusion of women and minorities in the military via the progressive UN Security Council Resolution 1325, military women often live in fear of expressing femininity and are required to hyper-masculinize themselves for protection. This commonality and the hyper-masculinization of women in the

¹ "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse." Conduct in UN Field Missions. Accessed May 15, 2017. <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-overview>

² Ibid.

³ Paisley Dodd. "UN Peacekeepers in Haiti Ran Child Sex Ring, Raped Women: AP Investigation." Global News. April 14, 2017. Accessed May 15, 2017. <http://globalnews.ca/news/3380202/un-peacekeepers-child-sex-haiti/>

⁴ Caitlin Bancroft. "Pentagon Releases New Statistics on Military Sexual Assault." Mic. November 8, 2013. Accessed May 15, 2017. <https://mic.com/articles/72503/pentagon-releases-startling-new-statistics-on-military-sexual-assault#.gu8qcqMIf>

military indicates that the primary function of including women in peacekeeping is either the objectification of their bodies for the male predatorial gaze or to be seen as “progressive and inclusive.” How can institutions like the UN be so passionate about eradicating SEA offenses towards civilians when SEA is seemingly interwoven into the peacekeeper military itself? For example, MONUSCO’s mandate was to use all means necessary to protect civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of violence and to support the Government of DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts. MONUSCO has been highly criticized for its mass SEA abuses. How do these abuses fit into its mission mandate? SEA not only affects civilians who rely on the assistance of UN peacekeeping missions, but it also affects female peacekeepers who fall victim to disloyal “comrades.” If UN female peacekeepers feel that the military is so unsafe that they must hyper-masculinize themselves around their comrades, an inherent problem exists with policy development and implementation in terms of peacekeeper training and reporting measures. Effective policy implementation requires enhanced screening peacekeeper protocols and enhanced gender training to assure their fitness to serve.

When asked about creating effective policy to address SEA offenses, prominent non-governmental security officials in Geneva argued that policy implementation relies on two simple criteria. The first is to create a policy that disrupts power dynamics between peacekeepers and civilians by highlighting proper prevention measures and ensuring the anonymity of victims when reporting these offenses. The second criteria is to distribute the policy between peacekeepers and the community in which the UN mission takes place, making sure parties recognize the services available to them to relay their experiences to officials.

This two-step policy is proven to be ineffective. No situation that involves SEA offenses is so simple as to say that proper policy requires effective procedural capabilities and distribution. In my view, the current policy is a Band-Aid on a bullet wound where the UN does not consider individual state situations or the intersectionality of race, gender, class and sexuality and how they interconnect with SEA offenses. Proper policy must be individualized for each country. Each Troop Contributing state should be required to submit prosecution standards prior to commencing peacekeeping missions and policy should include the perspectives of both male and female SEA victims in regards to proper precautionary measures and prosecution sentences.

Effective policy implementation not only requires the creation of a policy that outlines steps for prevention and prosecution, but also the existence of a nirvana state where civilians can trust authority to represent their cases, protecting and advocating for their basic human rights without jeopardizing safety of complainants and their families.

Since 1992, the UN has attempted to eradicate SEA offenses by following a two-step approach to policymaking and distribution. This has failed. Going forward, if there is any hope to protect innocent lives from wayward peacekeepers, there must be a radical change in UN policy creation, implementation, and distribution. There must be a change in the policies themselves as well as the proper procedures when these policies and their implementation fail.

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