

NATIONAL COMMENTARY

Abuses by U.N. peacekeepers a disgrace

By Robert Weiner and Sydney Hemmendinger, Special to Viewpoint

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Rapes by U.N. peacekeepers in Central Africa, in the hundreds, are repeated year after year. The victims are the very people the peacekeepers are supposed to protect.

The United Nations has announced over 100 new cases of sexual abuse by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic this year. Now, Human Rights Watch reports that the U.N.'s Congolese peacekeepers were responsible for at least 12 deaths.

This is the U.N.'s shame, and it must stop.

The rapes have been occurring for at least eight years. The U.N. Office of Internal Oversight Services received 480 reports of sexual abuse by U.N. African peacekeepers between 2008 and 2013, one-third against minors, with 80 new cases in 2014, 99 in 2015, and Voice of America reporting on March 4 this year that they are "on the rise."

Despite the reality of these atrocities, there has been no effective U.N. training or oversight, and no cutoff of funds to the abusing authorities.

Peter Gallo, former investigator in the Office of Internal Oversight Services at the U.N., told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on April 13, "The U.N. did nothing, but staff kept returning, day after day, to record how more and more children were being raped." Instead of doing something positive, the United Nations suspended their director

of field operations for the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Anders Kompass, when he reported peacekeepers in the Central African Republic.

In response, the U.N. threatened to remove him from his position and put him under disciplinary investigation. Following his exoneration, Kompass told the Guardian that "it is still a mystery why most of the U.N. leadership decided to do this to me when they knew very well how badly the U.N. was handling these types of cases and they knew there was a big gap in terms of under reporting."

In March, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution proposing that future investigations into sexual assault be completed within six months of the accusation, that DNA sample collection must occur where the assault was committed, and that the entire unit be sent home if a member is found guilty.

However, Egypt, Russia, and Senegal all complained. The Egyptian foreign minister tweeted, "What is sad is for a Security Council Permanent Rep to impose resolution on security council for publicity & personal ambition."

The culture of invisibility, hiding the truth, and inaction persists.

A bipartisan coalition of senators, led by Bob Corker, R-Tenn, and Ben Cardin, D-Maryland), have passed legislation in the Senate, in the State Department Authorization, to mandate training and oversight, and impose a 15 percent reduction of aid to the U.N. and international organizations that fail to protect individuals from sexual abuse.

However, no State Department Authorization has passed both chambers and become law since 2002. Corker told Newsweek in April that "If I knew right now that a U.N. peacekeeping mission was going into North Chattanooga today, which is where my wife is, I would be on the first plane out of here to protect her from the U.N. peacekeepers."

The unanimously passed Senate bill is now awaiting House approval. However, according to govtrack.us, the bill stands only a 38 percent chance of being enacted.

As authorized by Congress, the United States withdraws funding from countries for counter narcotics violations. We should take a similar action stand against the clear international human rights violations of U.N. peacekeeper rapes of civilians.

The U.S. contributes a quarter of the UN's annual \$8 billion peacekeeping budget. U.N. peacekeepers are supposed to be people that those in poor, conflict-ridden regions can look to for safety, not rapes and murders.

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