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## **Peacekeepers: Allegations of Abuse and Absence of Accountability at the United Nations**

*Opening Statement Rep. Chris Smith  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations  
April 13, 2016*

Today's hearing examining the consequences of sexual exploitation by United Nations peacekeepers marks the second in a series we are holding this year on the critical issue of lack of accountability at the United Nations and its subsidiary institutions.

It follows our February hearing which exposed illicit technology transfers to rogue regimes and corruption at the World Intellectual Property Organization, and the harassment of whistleblowers who sought to address the wrongs. It also follows on a series of hearings that this subcommittee held about a decade ago, when we examined allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of minors by UN Peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the need for true reform that would end the victimizing of the vulnerable by those who are supposed to be protectors.

Sadly, what was happening in the DRC more than ten years ago is today repeated in places such as the Central African Republic and Haiti.

At the time of our hearing on the DRC, I noted that we were to QUOTE "examine credible evidence of gross sexual misconduct and exploitation of refugees and vulnerable people by U.N. peacekeepers and civilian personnel assigned to U.N. peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo... These allegations typically involve peacekeeper sexual conduct with Congolese women and girls, usually in exchange for food or small sums of money. According to the U.N., these contacts occurred with sickening frequency and many involve girls under the age of 18, with some as young as 11 to 14 years of age. Even more troubling are allegations of rape, forced prostitution and demands of sex for jobs by U.N. civilian personnel."

We will hear from witnesses today who will tell us how little things have changed, and how a culture of turning a blind eye and covering up pervades the UN bureaucracy, not just in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations but in the very UN entities that are supposed to investigate wrongdoing and ensure accountability.

Perhaps even worse still, we will hear from a witness who will tell how in Darfur, UN Peacekeepers stood idly by while civilians were killed by Sudanese militias aligned with the government, and how the UN sought to cover up accurate reports of what was happening. This is so horrifying, that it brings to mind the atrocities that were committed in Srebrenica in 1995, when Dutch peacekeepers shut their eyes and ears to the killing of unarmed civilians that were taking place around them, when the promise of safe haven turned into the horror of a deathtrap.

What compounds the tragedy is that peacekeeping is essential to healing a broken world. The protectors are the predators.

During our February hearing on WIPO, I noted that “a culture of corruption” has beset the United Nations and other International Organizations, and how the sexual exploitation of minors occurring in UN peacekeeping missions transformed “ostensible emissaries of mercy into envoys of exploitation.” I also stated my belief that “by shining a light, we can help victims and help end corruption, bringing healing and true reform.”

That my desire for today’s hearing, that by calling attention to what is happening we can spur true reform. It is said that the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, has finally woken up to the true extent of the corruption, and is taking steps to end the culture of impunity and dysfunctionality that has characterized United Nations peacekeeping and U.N. oversight.

I hope that is true and not merely cosmetic.

The U.N. has laudable, and to be fair, difficult goals, but we must be steadfast in holding the U.N. accountable for its action and to weigh the results – good and bad – of U.N. work. American taxpayers provide more support for the U.N. peacekeepers than those of any other country, and with that, we in Congress bear a fiduciary onus not only to the taxpayers, but also to those innocents in countries who have been harmed by that actions of more than a few rotten apples.

I hope that today’s revelations and testimony will ensure that a spotlight continues to shine on the United Nations, and that as a result what is broken can be fixed, and people in need of healing be given respite from their afflictions.