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## The Future of Peacekeeping

*Excerpts of remarks by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)  
Chair of the House Global Human Rights and  
International Organizations Subcommittee  
Washington, DC—January 31, 2024*

Over the past several decades I have held a long series of hearings focused on accountability for peacekeeper abuse of local populations, especially in egregious cases of sexual abuse and exploitation like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Haiti.

I visited [Goma, DRC, in 2008](#) to investigate and chaired four hearings on rape and sexual abuse by MONUC. It was in a word “shocking”—the perpetrators largely evaded justice while the victims were severely traumatized.

Former Assistant Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations [Dr. Jane Holl Lute](#), testified at one of those hearings in 2005. and said: “The Blue Helmet has become black and blue through self-inflicted wounds of some of our number and we will not sit still until the luster of that Blue Helmet is restored... What are we doing to deal with the allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse? Again, as you point out, they are not unique to the Congo. They are not unique to this time. They have plagued peacekeeping missions in the past. Indeed, we understand from dialogue with member states that they plague deployments abroad for all of us. It is unacceptable. It is simply unacceptable. The United Nations peacekeepers owe a duty of care to the people we serve.”

Peacekeepers must be protectors and never predators. The UN must do more to ensure that perpetrators are punished and that these crimes are prevented in the first place.

Failures of peacekeeping missions are a stain on the UN’s record and have caused a crisis of credibility.

I think of Srebrenica.

At a [hearing I chaired in 1998](#), [HASAN NUHANOVIC](#), FORMER TRANSLATOR, U.N. PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN SREBRENICA told us how the Dutch UN peacekeepers enabled Bosnian Serb General Radko Mladic's genocide and slaughter of more than 8,000 Muslim men that the peacekeepers were deployed to protect.

I joined Bosnian President Dr. Haris Silajdžić at a solemn hallowed reinterment ceremony of hundreds of slaughtered people who were originally dumped into mass graves in Srebrenica—and was moved to tears.

I think of the Rwandan genocide, when UN peacekeepers could and likely would have prevented mass murder had an American President and the head of UN peacekeeping given the order.

I think of the mission in Lebanon, whose ability to fulfill its mandate is consistently eroded by Hezbollah which operates with impunity and continues to put peacekeepers in harm's way.

UN peacekeeping changed dramatically after the Cold War, with the number of missions ballooning in the 1990's and the scope of mandates becoming increasingly complex shifting from traditional nonmilitary functions like monitoring cessation of hostilities agreements to include assignments such as nation building.

Of the 11 UN peacekeeping operations currently active, 5 are in Africa – including the 3 largest missions in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan. There are over 71,000 troops deployed across these 11 missions today.

Since the UN began to record details in 2010, there have been 251 substantiated allegations of abuse or exploitation by uniformed personnel and 81 substantiated allegations by civilian personnel. Of the cases involving uniformed personnel, 246 cases have resulted in the repatriation of 308 personnel by the UN, and 102 cases have resulted in jail sentences from national governments for 138 total personnel. Of 81 civilian personnel cases, 16 have resulted in UN termination and 2 resulted in jail sentences from national governments.

What is alarming is that there were 530 new allegations between 2015 and 2023 with only 177 of them investigated with 75 substantiated claims and 50 still pending information.

Tragically, the DRC is emblematic of how deep the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse runs in UN peacekeeping. Just last year, in 2023, we received reports that UN peacekeepers were again abusing civilians in the DRC. Eight [South African peacekeepers were detained and repatriated](#) as a result of the scandal, but we have to ask—what assurance do we have that they will be held accountable?

Over the years, the UN has instituted various measures aimed at reforming transparency and accountability standards for peacekeepers.

In 2005, the Fourth Committee of the U.N. General Assembly unanimously endorsed the reform proposals of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, which include: Training

on standards of conduct; development of established units for peacekeeping, rather than those assembled on an ad hoc basis; commitments by all troop-contributing countries to pursue investigations and prosecutions of peacekeeping personnel for credible instances of sexual allegations and abuse; creation of a database to track allegations and ensure that prior offenders are not rehired; organization, management and command responsibility to create and maintain an environment that prevents against sexual exploitation and abuse; establishment of a professional and independent investigative capacity; assistance to victims; and development of a model MOU for troop-contributing countries to encompass these recommendations.

Also in 2005, the UN took the important step of establishing the Conduct and Discipline Unit at Headquarters as well as Conduct and Discipline Teams in field missions.

In 2008, the UN instituted an electronic database for tracking allegations of misconduct.

In 2015, the UN began to publish the nationalities of peacekeepers who are implicated and to more accurately detail the actions taken pursuant to these allegations. This year, the UN also issued a Policy on Accountability for Conduct and Discipline in Field Missions detailing steps for addressing misconduct.

In 2016, Secretary-General Guterres established a trust fund to support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 2272 that year, the first resolution dealing exclusively with sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, to request the Secretary-General repatriate units where there is credible evidence of abuse and to clarify the responsibilities of troop and police contributing countries to investigate allegations and punish perpetrators.

Also in 2016, the General Assembly adopted a resolution that demands full implementation of the UN's zero tolerance policy in all peacekeeping missions.

In 2017, the UN piloted a system-wide incident reporting mechanism and appointed the first Victims' Rights Advocate to promote a more victim-centered approach.

American taxpayers provide more support for UN peacekeeping operations than any other country, and the US rate is currently assessed at over 26% of peacekeeping costs. In FY23, Congress appropriated nearly \$1.5 billion to the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities account.

So we in Congress bear a special responsibility to the American people and vulnerable populations abroad to ensure that peacekeepers are held to the highest standards of behavior.

That is why I included provisions related to peacekeeping operations, including human trafficking by peacekeeping personnel as part of the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons, in the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act](#) that I authored in 2000 and subsequent reauthorizations.