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Since perpetrators are seldom brought to justice, only a fraction of the victims have the courage to come forward and report abuse. Therefore, there should be programs for imparting value education to peacekeepers – Sreoshi Sinha\*

More than 50 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving the [UN](#) peacekeeping personnel and its partners serving in the field were received during the first three months of this year. According to a statement by the U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq, on 1st May 2018, 14 allegations involved U.N. peacekeeping operations, 18 involved U.N. agencies, funds and programs, and 21 were related to U.N. partner organizations. One allegation involved a member of a non-U.N. international force operating under a U.N. Security Council mandate.[\[1\]](#) According to yet another UN Report,[\[2\]](#) of 2017, the United Nations received 138 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, over 40 percent arising from its peacekeeping missions; this is certainly not the first time that the UN has been in the spotlight over such allegations. These have been made since the early 1990s, but the latest figures[\[3\]](#) demonstrate that in spite of all efforts of the organisation to eradicate this phenomenon, sexual misconduct by UN peacekeepers is gradually going higher on the scale of occurrence.

Ever since its inception in May 1948, United Nations peacekeeping operations have been one of the most successful tools used by the international community to manage the most complex challenges to international peace and security. None can contest their role in facilitating the political process, protection and promotion of human rights and assistance in restoring the rule of law, 70 peacekeeping operations have achieved victories in East Timor, El Salvador, Sierra Leone and Mozambique, while some has also faced tragic ends in places such as Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and Herzegovina. However, various important factors are responsible for the causes behind these mixed results of UN Peacekeeping. Meanwhile, sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and violations of International Humanitarian Law by the, remains an important concern. According to a UN investigation of 2013, exploitation ranging from rape to transactional sex, sex trafficking, prostitution and pornography of women and children by peacekeepers, aid workers, private contractors and other interveners has been the most significant risk to UN peacekeeping missions'[\[4\]](#)

Sexual exploitation and abuse of women and children in various war-torn countries is not a new phenomenon and dates back to centuries. But, when UN peacekeepers exploit the vulnerability of the people they have been sent to protect, it is definitely a fundamental betrayal of trust. The first publicly documented case of Sexual exploitation and abuse dates back to the 1990s during the U.N peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Cambodia and Timor Leste. Ever since then, cases of such abuse have been repeated quite frequently in various missions and countries around the world. Regardless of multiple efforts from the United Nations, the situation has not improved and is even seen escalating recently. The recurrence of this conduct by UN peacekeeping personnel not only undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the peacekeeping missions by creating distrust among the local people and severely harming the country's development towards a functioning civil society, but also contributes to the spreading of sexually transmitted diseases in the area, and leads to a significant rise in prostitution. Besides these, a very unique consequence of such behaviour is the birth of the *Peacekeeper babies*, as the United Nations calls such infants who are born from sexual encounters with local girls and women, and are then left to taking care of them alone, with no support from the fathers, not even acknowledgement of paternity.

### ***UN Measures to address the challenge***



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In spite of such inhumane consequences, the UN's attempt to eradicate the *cancer of this system*<sup>[5]</sup> as propounded by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, has completely failed because the manner in which UN agencies responded to the allegations was seriously flawed. In 1998 the UN released the "Ten Rules: Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets" which provided the peacekeeping personnel with rules to obey in order to avoid any type of misconduct. To ensure that the codes were followed, the cards were to be carried by the personnel at all times while on a mission. However, the codes had no substantial effect on the exploitation, as during the following years the cases kept on increasing. Again in response to the rising influx of such abuses at the beginning of the 21st-century, the U.N introduced its Zero-Tolerance Policy in 2003, which signalled that, if

found guilty of any criminal behaviour certain repatriation would follow. The new policy specifically forbade any sexual relations with prostitutes and people under the age of 18. Again, contrary to high expectations the policy did nothing to protect the locals from exploitation and abuse. At the moment the U.N follows a three-pronged strategy in addressing all misconduct. These include prevention of misconduct, enforcement of U.N standards of conduct, and remedial action.

### ***Reasons for Failure***

In spite of all such policies, the U.N. system responsible for handling and prosecuting such cases has been widely criticized as flawed and dysfunctional<sup>[6]</sup> and there are reasons for this. Firstly, the U.N has been criticized for improperly enforcing resolutions targeting such abuses. Secondly, owing to the 1946 resolution providing immunity for U.N peacekeeping personnel the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators have proved to be very difficult. Their prosecution poses a problem because “peacekeepers who commit crimes fall under the jurisdiction of their home countries, which frequently do nothing to hold them accountable legally.” Lastly, inadequate victim assistance in terms of better medical and psychological support is also an important reason for the failure of the UN in weeding out this menace. Since perpetrators are seldom brought to justice, only a fraction of the victims have the courage to come forward and report abuse. Therefore, there should be programs for imparting value education to peacekeepers.

Hence, though U.N peacekeeping missions have brought stability and prosperity in a number of war-torn areas around the globe, yet the organization has lost its dignity and credibility at various instances due to the occurrence of some behavioural misconduct. Abuse of those who most need help brings dishonour to the values held by the U.N. It should be kept in mind that the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse as complex it is, needs to be addressed. It should be at the top of the UN priority list, last few such instances undo and destroy the reputation of several hundreds of United Nations Peacekeepers.

These soldiers work in difficult environments under trying circumstances. Their work needs to be feted, not disparaged under the allegations of misconduct. The peacekeepers owe it to themselves and their peers to refrain from such behaviour and not malign the credibility of their own organisation and missions.

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*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team.*

[1] Press, T. A. (2018, May 1). United Nations receives 54 allegations of sexual misconduct in 3 months United Nations.

[2] PRESS, T. A. (2018, March 13). UN received 138 allegations of sexual misconduct in 2017, Daily News.

[3]“(Ibid.p-1)”

[4] Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, Louise Searle; Sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations: trends, policy responses and future directions, International Affairs, Volume 93, Issue 2, 1 March 2017, Pages 365-387

[5] Sieff, K. (2016, February 27). Sexual abuse called ‘a cancer’ in U.N. peacekeeper system. The Press Herald.

[6]“(Ibid.p-2)”

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