

4 April 2005

Presentation by Jean-Marie Guéhenno
Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations
to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Opening remarks

I am grateful for the privilege of addressing the Special Committee, as we continue together to address the challenges that face peacekeeping. When we met last February, I expressed to you my deep concern that the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse threatened to undermine the many gains peacekeeping has made and besmirch the very name of the United Nations. Indeed, it is precisely the image and reputation of the United Nations that gives us the credibility to work so effectively in war-torn countries and bring peace and stability to millions across the world.

Mr. Chairman, the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation in peacekeeping is an abhorrent one. It will not be a simple problem to address, but one can take courage from the shared sense of urgency and determination that exists across the United Nations to address it. It is with this sense of urgency and determination that DPKO has already undertaken a range of measures that lie within its purview. It is with the same sense of urgency and determination that you have come together again, so soon after the Special Committee's regular 2005 session, when you expressed your outrage and called for a comprehensive report on the problem.

As a result of the Committee's request, we now have before us the report of the Secretary-General's Special Advisor, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussein, a report which must be commended. It provides a clear framework for effective and long term action. The report also underscores a key point that we must bear in mind. The problem of sexual exploitation and abuse will only be solved by joint action – action by the Secretariat here at headquarters, by the TCCs and the General Assembly as a whole, and by the managers and leaders in peacekeeping operations on the ground.

I know the Prince will be outlining the comprehensive range of recommendations in his report, for the Committee's consideration. I would therefore propose, Mr. Chairman, to use my remarks to bring the Committee up to date on the range of measures which DPKO has already undertaken to address the problem, even while I anticipate and look forward to implementing the range of further actions that will emanate from this Committee's recommendations.

Since 1 December 2004, investigations have been completed into allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving 86 peacekeeping personnel (19 civilians and 77 military). So far three UN staff have been summarily dismissed, six more are undergoing the disciplinary process and three have been cleared. On the military side, 66 persons have been repatriated or rotated home on disciplinary grounds including 6 commanders.

Over the past year, missions have put in place a wide array of measures to prevent misconduct and to enforce UN standards of conduct. For instance, on the prevention side, missions in Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia provide basic induction training on UN standards of conduct relating to sexual exploitation and abuse. Earlier this year, awareness-raising posters and brochures on sexual exploitation and abuse have been distributed to all missions.

With regard to enforcement of UN standards of conduct, missions in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, the Congo, Ethiopia, Kosovo and Timor-Leste have established lists of premises and areas frequented by prostitutes which are now out-of-bounds to all personnel. We have a network of focal points on sexual exploitation and abuse in all mission headquarters to facilitate receipt of allegations as well as telephone hotlines in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In the DRC, our mission has put in place a number of mission-specific measures such as a requirement for contingent members to wear their uniform at all times. Our Congo mission also required regional heads of offices to come up with concrete workplans on how they will prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

These measures are having an impact on the ground, but they do not in and of themselves constitute a comprehensive strategy. These measures are only a first step along what will be a long and arduous path of systemic change and reform. Indeed, the problem is likely to get worse before it gets better. In other words, as we improve our complaints mechanisms in the field and as people start to trust that action will be taken against those who violate UN standards of conduct, the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse will probably increase not decrease.

At DPKO Headquarters, DPKO has established a task force which is aimed at developing guidance and tools for peacekeeping operations to address sexual exploitation and abuse effectively. For instance, we are designing a database to track and monitor allegations and investigations involving sexual exploitation and abuse as well as follow-up action. DPKO is also developing internal communications messages to remind peacekeeping personnel of our duty of care and why we serve.

In addition, DPKO is co-chairing with OCHA a broader initiative under the auspices of Joint Executive Committee (ECHA-ECPS). This joint initiative aims at creating an organizational culture throughout the UN system that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse. It is also developing common policies and guidance, for instance on victim assistance.

The various measures that my Department has undertaken over the past year at Headquarters and in the field have opened our eyes to the enormity of the task that lies ahead of us. We need deep, systemic change. Prince Zeid's report on sexual exploitation and abuse provides a wide range of recommendations, which I believe will bring us closer to this goal.

Many of the recommendations in Prince Zeid's report are within the purview of DPKO and the Secretariat to implement. I will do my utmost to implement such recommendations with due haste. However, others require the support of Member States as well as additional resources. The ACABQ has before it a proposal for a Personnel Conduct Unit at DPKO Headquarters as well as a number of Personnel Conduct Units for field missions. Such a capacity represents an essential tool for preventing misconduct, monitoring compliance with UN standards and ensuring swift follow-up on disciplinary cases. In an organization that aims towards professional standards, this is no longer a luxury but a must.

My Department is ready to put in place the systemic reforms that the General Assembly may wish to endorse from the Zeid report. I also understand that some issues may require further work to develop and clarify concepts. For instance, it is clear that DPKO needs access to a professional, independent investigative capacity that it can call upon for egregious allegations of a criminal nature. However, in addition, it would be worth considering whether UN peacekeeping may require an internal investigative capacity, which would serve as a management tool for Heads of Mission. Such an "Inspectorate General" would therefore be complementary to an outside investigative capacity. Though certainly, the idea of an "Inspectorate General" is one which would require further development, in close consultation with you.

Many of the recommendations made in Prince Zeid's report will have implications for UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes who work collaboratively with peacekeeping operations. These recommendations would be examined through the Joint Executive Committee ECHA/ECPS Task Force.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguishes Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Concluding remarks

Sexual exploitation and abuse does not occur in a vacuum. These acts occur where there is a general breakdown in discipline. Prince Zeid's recommendations are an acknowledgement that lasting reform is needed on many fronts. My Department is committed to putting in place the changes required both in the short- and longer-term. There is no turning back. I look forward to working with you, to implement the reforms that you decide upon, and to root out this problem through our joint and determined action.

If we fail, this week, to approve decisive and visible steps to limit sexual abuse in UN peacekeeping, then it will have serious implications for the future of peacekeeping. I do not say this lightly.

We need to leave this room with a uniform, binding disciplinary standard for UN peacekeeping, approval in principle of a professional investigation process and to take a strong step forward to ensure criminal accountability of civilian peacekeeping personnel.

I look forward to hearing your discussions over the coming week.

Thank you.

UN Senior Officials on Peacekeeping
Peacekeeping
UN Home