

# WebMemo



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## The United States Must Act to End Abuses by U.N. Peacekeepers

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The recent revelation of widespread sexual abuse by United Nations personnel of refugees in southern Sudan, many of them children, has cast another pall over the reputation of the United Nations. Incidents of sexual exploitation in U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world have become depressingly routine. Abuse by U.N. peacekeepers has taken place in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, and Cambodia—in four continents altogether.<sup>1</sup> Congress and the Bush Administration must act to help ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and that future abuses are prevented.

The United States must send a clear message that it will not tolerate abuse in U.S.-funded peacekeeping operations and must press strongly for the prosecution of U.N. peacekeepers by their own national governments. Congress, which holds the purse strings to U.S. funding for the United Nations, has an important role to play in helping put an end to the culture of impunity within U.N. peacekeeping. By launching its own investigations into peacekeeper abuse, as well as holding hearings on the issue, the House and Senate can dramatically raise the international profile of the matter and force the U.N. to treat the issue with the seriousness it deserves.

Congress and the Executive Branch can also apply pressure for the establishment of an external watchdog for U.N. operations, accountable to the U.N. Security Council, but comprised of non-U.N. staff. Only a genuinely independent oversight mechanism can ensure the kind of accountability

and scrutiny that is so badly needed for U.N. peacekeeping operations. Congress is also in a position to reduce or withhold funding for peacekeeping missions unless there is a significant improvement in the behavior of U.N. peacekeepers.

**The Sudan U.N. Abuse Scandal.** On January 3, *The Daily Telegraph* revealed that “members of the United Nations peacekeeping forces in southern Sudan are facing allegations of raping and abusing children as young as 12.”<sup>2</sup> The paper interviewed more than 20 victims in the city of Juba alone and reported that hundreds more may have been abused by U.N. peacekeepers since the 10,000-strong United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) arrived in the region two years ago after decades of civil war. The report was a huge embarrassment to the United Nations, which had recently adopted a policy of “zero tolerance” for sexual abuse by its peacekeepers, half a century after its peacekeeping operations began.

The United States has a major stake in the Sudan mission, having contributed over \$500 million to UNMIS in 2005 and 2006 combined. The State Department “supports the on-going deployment of U.N. peacekeeping troops in Southern Sudan and an early expansion into Darfur,” with \$441 million requested for 2007.<sup>3</sup>

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The Sudan scandal comes just two years after then-U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged that “acts of gross misconduct” had been committed by personnel serving in the U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).<sup>4</sup> The crimes—consisting of at least 150 human rights violations in all—involved rape and forced prostitution of women and young girls across the country, including inside a refugee camp in the town of Bunia in northeastern Congo. The alleged perpetrators included U.N. military and civilian personnel from Nepal, Morocco, Tunisia, Uruguay, South Africa, Pakistan, and France. The victims were defenseless refugees—many children—who had already been brutalized and terrorized by years of war.<sup>5</sup> Since 2000, MONUC has received a staggering \$1.3 billion in total U.S. funding, with an additional \$152 million requested for 2007.<sup>6</sup>

The U.N. has consistently attempted to hide or downplay abuses within its operations, preferring the cloak of secrecy to the harsh light of public scrutiny. As in the Congo case, the leadership of the United Nations has been extraordinarily slow in

publicly acknowledging the scale of the problem in the Sudan or even admitting that criminal activity has taken place. The allegations relating to the Sudan first surfaced in May 2006, but were summarily dismissed at the time as unfounded “rumors.”<sup>7</sup> It was only after the *Telegraph* report was released that the U.N. admitted to repatriating four Bangladeshi peacekeeping personnel in connection with the allegations.<sup>8</sup> With regard to the Congo scandal, it took the Secretary-General several months to accept full responsibility after initial reports in *The Independent* documented extensive abuse by U.N. personnel.<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of media scrutiny over the Sudan scandal, the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping revealed this month that it had investigated 319 peacekeeping personnel over allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse across its 16 missions between January 2004 and November 2006. A total of 179 personnel were dismissed or repatriated following the inquiries. Not one person, however, has been prosecuted for these serious crimes.<sup>10</sup>

The U.N.’s own investigations, conducted by an understaffed and overstretched Office of Internal

1. For background on the history of peacekeeper abuse, see Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “Sex and the UN: When Peacemakers Become Predators,” *The Independent*, January 11, 2005, at [news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/article14411.ece](http://news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/article14411.ece), and Colum Lynch, “UN Faces More Accusations of Sexual Misconduct,” *Washington Post*, March 13, 2005, at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30286-2005Mar12.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30286-2005Mar12.html).
2. Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “UN Staff Accused of Raping Children in Sudan,” *The Daily Telegraph*, January 4, 2007, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/03/wsudan03.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/03/wsudan03.xml).
3. U.S. Department of State Account Tables, Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities, FY 2005 to FY 2007, at [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2007/html/60203.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2007/html/60203.htm); U.S. State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs, Press Relations Office, *Fact Sheet: United States Policy on Sudan*, May 8, 2006, at [www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/65973.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/65973.htm); and U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *America: Helping the People of Sudan*, April 27, 2006, at [www.state.gov/documents/organization/65508.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65508.pdf).
4. “Annan Vows to End Sex Abuse Committed by U.N. Mission Staff in DR of Congo,” U.N. News Center, November 19, 2004, at [www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=12590&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=12590&Cr=democratic&Cr1=congo).
5. For more detail, see Nile Gardiner, Ph.D., “The UN Peacekeeping Scandal in the Congo: How Congress Should Respond,” Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 868, March 22, 2005, at [www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl868.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl868.cfm).
6. U.S. Department of State Account Tables, Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities, FY 2000 to FY 2007, at [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2007/html/60203.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2007/html/60203.htm), [www.state.gov/documents/organization/17240.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/17240.pdf), and [www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2002/2106.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/rls/iab/2002/2106.htm).
7. Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “UN Staff Accused of Raping Children in Sudan,” *The Daily Telegraph*, January 4, 2007, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/03/wsudan03.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/03/wsudan03.xml), and Mike Pflanz and Kate Holt, “UN Sent Home Soldiers After Claims of Child Abuse in Sudan,” *The Daily Telegraph*, January 5, 2007, at [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/05/wsudan05.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/01/05/wsudan05.xml).
8. “Four Peacekeepers Accused of Sex Abuse Already Repatriated – UN Mission in Sudan,” UN News Centre, January 4, 2007, at [www.un.org/apps/news/ticker/tickerstory.asp?NewsID=21160](http://www.un.org/apps/news/ticker/tickerstory.asp?NewsID=21160).
9. See Kate Holt and Sarah Hughes, “Sex and Death in the Heart of Africa,” *The Independent*, May 25, 2004.

Oversight Services, have only begun to address the horrendous level of abuse within U.N. peacekeeping operations. The scale of sexual exploitation is likely far greater than the United Nations admits, with a large number of cases going unreported in places such as the Congo and the Sudan, where highly vulnerable refugees are afraid to come forward for fear of retribution. A large-scale, wide-ranging, fully independent investigation is needed. It must have extensive powers to interview U.N. personnel and the ability to gather evidence in the field. Also needed is a permanent external watchdog to monitor the conduct of U.N. operations.

**Recommendations.** While very few U.S. soldiers serve in U.N. peacekeeping missions (and no U.S. personnel have been implicated in abuse cases), Washington has a vested interest in ensuring that global operations funded by the U.S. taxpayer are free of corruption, mismanagement, and abuse by peacekeepers. The culture of “hear no evil, see no evil” that has dominated the United Nations must be brought to an end.

The United States is the greatest financial contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations, being assessed 27 percent of the U.N.’s total peacekeeping budget, roughly \$4.75 billion for the period from July 2006 to June 2007.<sup>11</sup> The Bush Administration has requested \$1.3 billion for worldwide peacekeeping operations in fiscal year 2007.<sup>12</sup>

There are several specific steps that Congress, the Administration, and the U.N. itself can take to increase oversight of U.N. peacekeeping operations, improve accountability and transparency, and help ensure that U.N. personnel guilty of criminal behavior are prosecuted:

- **Hold hearings:** Congress should hold hearings to address the incidents of sexual exploitation committed by U.N. peacekeeping personnel in the Sudan and call senior U.N. officials to testify.
- **Investigate abuses:** The United States should call for a Security Council-backed independent

investigation into abuses by peacekeepers and civilian U.N. personnel in the Sudan, Congo, and other major U.N. peacekeeping operations, including Haiti, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Burundi.

- **Establish a watchdog:** An external oversight body—completely independent of the U.N. Secretariat and backed by a Security Council mandate—should be established to act as a watchdog over U.N. operations, including humanitarian programs and peacekeeping operations. This watchdog organization would enforce the high standards that should be required of U.N. peacekeeping personnel.
- **Establish U.S. oversight:** The United States should also set up its own U.N. oversight unit, answerable to Congress and specifically charged with monitoring the use of American contributions to United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This could be funded by diverting part of the annual assessed contribution to the United Nations.
- **Push for prosecutions:** The United States should pressure U.N. member states to prosecute their nationals accused of human rights violations while serving in U.N. peacekeeping operations. The U.N. should lift diplomatic immunity for its own staff accused of criminal acts in the Congo and Sudan, opening the way for prosecution.
- **Identify perpetrators’ countries:** The U.N. should publicly name and shame those countries whose peacekeepers have carried out abuses in the Sudan, Congo, and other parts of the world.
- **Exclude past abusers:** Washington should press for the U.N. Security Council to exclude from future operations countries whose peacekeepers have a history of human rights violations unless they demonstrate a commitment to trying and punishing their nationals accused of criminal

10. Edith M. Lederer, “UN Investigated Over 300 for Sex Abuse,” Associated Press, January 6, 2007, and Francis Elliott and Ruth Elkins, “UN Shame Over Sex Scandal,” *The Independent on Sunday*, January 7, 2007, at <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/politics/article2132576.ece>.

11. United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, *Background Note*, October 31, 2006, at [www.un.org/depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm).

12. UNA-USA Fact Sheet, *United Nations Funding; FY2007 Budget Request*, at [www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpFE&b=667579](http://www.unausa.org/site/pp.asp?c=fvKRI8MPJpFE&b=667579).

behavior. Individual peacekeeping personnel involved in sexual exploitation should be immediately blacklisted from participation in all future peacekeeping missions.

- **Improve transparency:** The U.N. should make public all internal reports relating to the Sudan and Congo abuse scandals and outline the specific steps it plans to take to prevent the sexual exploitation of refugees in both existing and future U.N. peacekeeping operations.
- **Withhold contributions:** Congress should withhold a percentage of the U.S. contribution to U.N. peacekeeping operations unless U.N. personnel responsible for criminal activity are prosecuted and safeguards are put in place to prevent future abuses.

**Conclusion.** The growing scandal surrounding U.N. peacekeepers in southern Sudan, combined with large-scale peacekeeping abuses in the Congo, further undermine the credibility of the United Nations and raise serious questions regarding the effectiveness of the U.N.'s leadership. New Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon should make the elimination of sexual exploitation in U.N. operations a top priority and pledge to bring guilty parties to justice through sustained pressure upon member

states. Under his predecessor Kofi Annan, the U.N. consistently failed to publicize, prevent, and punish the criminal behavior of its own personnel in trouble spots around the world. Congress should make it clear to the United Nations that continued robust U.S. funding of U.N. peacekeeping will be contingent upon the elimination of all forms of abuse.

The sexual abuse scandals across the world make a mockery of the U.N.'s professed commitment to uphold basic human rights. It is a travesty that in the shadow of the genocide in Darfur carried out by barbaric Sudanese-backed Janjaweed militias, personnel from the United Nations have been preying on refugees. U.N. peacekeepers and the civilian officials who work with them should be symbols of the international community's commitment to protecting the weak and innocent in times of war. The exploitation of some of the most vulnerable people in the world—refugees in war-ravaged countries—is a shameful episode and a betrayal of trust that will haunt the United Nations for years to come.

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