



## **UN WOMEN: SEXUAL ABUSE BY UN PEACEKEEPERS TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN CONFLICT ZONES**

United Nations peacekeepers, also known as “Blue Helmets” due to their characteristic blue head gear, are the military personnel sent by the UN to help in maintaining ceasefires and stabilizing situations on the ground, providing crucial support for political efforts to resolve conflict by peaceful means and other humanitarian actions that may be needed in war zones.

The UN has been deploying military personnel for service in peace operations since 1948, when the Security Council authorized the deployment of UN military observers to the Middle East to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

UN military personnel can be called upon to:

- Protect civilians and UN personnel;
- Monitor a disputed border;
- Monitor and observe peace processes in post-conflict areas;
- Provide security across a conflict zone;
- Provide security during elections;
- Assist in-country military personnel with training and support and;
- Assist former combatants in implementing the peace agreements they may have signed.

Theoretically, peacekeepers enter war zones to make sure that people who are caught within the limits of that zone are safe from the violence of the armed groups that are part of that conflict, but that is not always the case.

Over the past 5 years the UN has recognized 612 cases of sexual abuse by the blue helmets, but UN officials believe that the allegations represent only a low percentage of the actual cases. Experts estimate, that the real figure is around 10 times that amount. The incidents reported include multiple women and children involved that claim that they have been abused by more than one peacekeeper.

Throughout the years, the number of conflicts has raised exponentially and so the number of peacekeepers deployed throughout the world; because of this a solution to the vulnerability of the citizens of this troubled countries is a priority.



Due to the circumstances lived by the communities in which peacekeepers serve, they are aware of the poverty and needs of the inhabitants and unfortunately some of them take advantage of the situation in order to abuse of children and women. They often trick women and girls into their horrible acts by offering them food or other products that they cannot easily get like soap bars or shampoo; sometimes they even promise their victims a future outside their country of origin, that they will marry them or that they will keep them safe.

Throughout the years, the UN peacekeepers have been accused of sexual abuse in many of the countries they are serving at. Some examples are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and Liberia. There is a higher number of incidents of sexual violence against young girls and women in the Central African Republic, due to the extreme circumstances that exist in those countries. It is also worth noticing that according to the studies made by the UN, the CAR (Central African Republic) area is one of the zones with more violent assaults against women, this includes rape and murder, and it's also a zone with a really low percentage of cases solved.

In 2016 alone, the UN reported 41 cases of abuse involving peacekeepers from Burundi and Gabon, which included eight paternity cases and six of those cases were committed against minors.

Inside the UN, neither the Department of Peacekeeping Operations nor the Member States had discussed the problem until the revelation of the statistics that showed the substantial number of the sexual abuse cases in the countries where blue helmets were serving. Today, with the severity of the problem that has been openly recognized, there has been a meaningful progress made by the UN due to the strategies taken in each conflict area with the goal of eradicating those attacks. The UN has established several local commissions to investigate punish the attackers, and to help the victims of those abuses by offering them psychological therapy and safety from their attackers. There is a "zero tolerance" policy in the UN regarding prostitution (prostituting someone, or having sexual relationships with prostitutes) and for having relationships with someone under the age of 18, and not all troop contingents or staff on the ground fully support this policy.

Eliminating such misconduct is integral to the success of peacekeeping. Resolving and preventing future acts of sexual exploitation and abuse is part of the fundamental shift in the culture of the way the Organization operates

The UN came up several strategies to make front to this misbehavior, and to the sexual abuse. Some crucial points to consider are: prevention, effective application of United Nations standards of conduct and corrective measures, supporting the victims of sexual attacks, the complete eradication of these crimes in war zones, awareness campaigns and new transparency policies.

In November 3rd, 2017, there were 31 reports regarding sexual abuse, 12 of them were from peacekeepers. In February 22nd, 2018, there were 40 reports and 15 of them where against peacekeepers. In May 2018, 14 cases of sexual abuse were reported also referring peacekeepers as the attackers, and in July there were 18 cases in the same terms.



More than 221 peacekeepers have been investigated and more than 88 uniformed personnel has been repatriated. Conduct and discipline units have been established in some peacekeeping missions and the number of gender and children advisors in the United Nations peace support missions have increased. It was generally acknowledged that despite those measures, problems have persisted in several missions. Troop-contributing countries, therefore, have been urged to ensure that their deployed personnel is appropriately trained, and that those troops are held to the highest standards of conduct.

Sexual abuse and harassment is an issue that can have both physical and psychological effects in women and girls, therefore, it is important to find a way to protect them and to prevent this situation. The UN has the labor to set specific goals to fight the sexual abuse that victims all over the world are suffering. These goals should be addressed to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations staff.

To find a solution for this issue, it is important to consider the ideas and projects each country has to offer, and the actions they have and are willing to take in this international crisis, this is why all the present delegations are involved in finding a solution not only for the affected states, but for all women in the world

**QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED:**

1. What is your country's stance on the issue?
2. How can young girls and women be protected from the sexual abuse and the psychological effects that this issue comes along with?
3. What are some goals the United Nations should set in the fight to stop girls and women from being sexually abused by peacekeepers?
4. What course of action has your country previously taken on the issue?
5. Are UN protection programs distributed equally amongst the troubled zones, and how could countries ensure they are equally distributed?
6. What measures could be taken by local governments to ensure the safety of their citizens?
7. What international treaties could be used to enforce a solution? (remember that not all the international treaties apply to every region).
8. As countries without peacekeeper intervention, what could you contribute to make the UN intervention safer? (remember you can help not only with international policies; the UN peacekeeper initiative is conformed of people from most of the countries throughout the world. This may include measures to regulate the people who countries can deploy to those missions).



9. As a country with peacekeeper intervention, what could other countries contribute to reduce the incident of sexual abuse cases?

10. Is this issue limited to international law, or can this (or should this) be treated or resolved by the local authorities; if so, how would your country handle this kind of sexual abuse crimes?

**RESEARCH SOURCES:**

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-06-09/un-peacekeepers-sexual-assault-problem>

<https://www.un.org/es/peacekeeping/issues/cdu.shtml>

<https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/quarterly-updates>

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/military>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/peacekeepers-hit-allegations-sex-abuse-170701133655238.html>

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/sc8649.doc.htm>

<https://www.thenewamerican.com/world-news/north-america/item/21090-sex-abuse-by-un-peace-troops-becoming-global-scandal>

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history>

<https://www.apnews.com/tag/UnitedNations>

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/sexual-assault-and-rape/sexual-assault>