

Canada urged to help strengthen UN's 'zero-tolerance' for abuse by peacekeepers



Advocates want Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, seen here at the United Nations headquarters in New York, to play a leadership role in ensuring accountability of UN peacekeepers. (Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)

The allegations of sexual misconduct levelled against two Quebec police officers in Haiti have advocates pressing the Trudeau government to take a leadership role to ensure United Nations peacekeepers are held accountable.

The calls come after CBC News reported this week that two Sûreté du Québec sergeants under investigation for misconduct retired ahead of their disciplinary hearings. As well, two officers with the Montreal police force received suspensions of five and nine days respectively for fathering children with Haitian women, CBC News reported earlier this year.

The RCMP also confirmed Friday that a Mountie faces allegations of sexual exploitation or abuse during a peacekeeping mission abroad, though they wouldn't provide any details about the case, citing confidentiality.

- [Quebec police retire before hearings over alleged sexual misconduct in Haiti](#)
- [Haiti case points to loopholes allowing cops to avoid disciplinary action](#)

Paula Donovan, one of the directors of Code Blue, an organization devoted to holding UN peacekeeping personnel accountable, said those cases point to a larger problem on many UN missions.

Donovan said the "crisis" within the UN presents an opportunity for Canada as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau looks to make his stamp internationally.

Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion has already signalled he wants Canada to play a greater role in peacekeeping missions, as the federal government is seeking a [seat on the UN Security Council](#).

Donovan said Canada can do so with the condition that it is "re-entering peacekeeping in a big and forceful way with a true adherence to zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse."

A policy without teeth

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said the UN is "profoundly committed to a zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation or abuse by our own personnel."

Oftentimes, however, troops accused of wrongdoing escape without so much as an investigation.

The current UN policy when it comes to ensuring accountability of UN personnel is "so vague that it is difficult to understand what it means," Donovan said.

"Sexual exploitation is apparently something the UN has no tolerance for, and yet when you read through the policy it says that it is 'discouraged.' So, no one can really point to a document and say everyone knows every peacekeeper is held to this standard," she said.

A recent UN report detailed the problem of exploitation and sexual abuse by UN personnel in peacekeeping



Paula Donovan, co-director of Code Blue, wants Canada to take a leadership role in holding UN peacekeeping personnel accountable. (Alexis MacDonald/Aids Free World)

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missions, particularly in the Central African Republic.

The report found that only 17 of 69 investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse reported in 2015 were completed by the end of January 2016.

The perpetrator was punished in only one of those cases — the one involving a Montreal police officer suspended for nine days.



Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, says the culture of impunity within the UN 'deeply alarming.' (Bebeto Matthews/Associated Press)

Following the release of the UN report, Samantha Power, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, called the culture of impunity within the agency "deeply alarming."

"We have long known that one of the most effective ways to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation is to send a clear message that perpetrators will be held accountable," Power said.

Ottawa commits to change

In a statement, Canada's Department of Global Affairs said it's committed to making UN personnel more accountable.

Canada supports the implementation of new initiatives recently announced by the secretary general, including the "UN's efforts to demonstrate greater transparency in the handling of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse and to improve its zero-tolerance policy," the statement said.

- [What should Canada's role be in the UN?](#)
- [PM invokes Canada's peacekeeping past in seeking UN Security Council seat](#)

Canada has been involved in UN missions in Haiti since 1993, making it the largest and longest engagement of the country's International Police Peace Operations program.

The country sent peacekeepers in 2004 as part of a force aimed at keeping order following a violent rebellion that toppled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and again strengthened its presence following the 2010 earthquake.

In recent years, some UN peacekeepers in Haiti have been accused of rape and other abuse, of using excessive force and of inadvertently introducing cholera because of inadequate sanitation at a base used by troops from Nepal.

Le Devoir newspaper reported recently that the federal government was considering assuming military command of the Haiti mission.

However, François Lasalle, a spokesman for Global Affairs, said by email that "there are currently no plans to assume military command of MINUSTAH, which Brazil has skilfully and generously led since 2004."