

Box 3.7.1 Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peace Operations

In 2004 there was considerable coverage of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by UN peacekeeping mission staff in the DRC. As the UN attempted to improve its complaints mechanism, there was a sharp increase in reports of SEA. Whereas the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) had investigated allegations of SEA against five staff and nineteen military personnel in 2003 worldwide, MONUC received seventy complaints from May to September 2004 alone. The UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) reported sexual favors being bought with food—as little as two eggs—and the exploitation of orphans.

Further to a request from the UN General Assembly's Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, the Secretary-General invited Prince Zeid, permanent representative of Jordan to the United Nations, to conduct a comprehensive analysis on SEA by peacekeeping personnel. Released in March 2005, the study identified five principal challenges:

- The diverse categories of personnel employed in each peace operation are governed by different legal systems.

- A lack of specialized investigative expertise limits the capacity for thorough reviews of allegations.
- There is a need to raise awareness of SEA and establish organizational, managerial, and command responsibility for the problem.
- There is a need for compliance measures and individual disciplinary, financial, and criminal accountability for SEA.
- While UN personnel have immunity in their countries of deployment, this can be waived, but local judicial systems may be insufficient to assure fair trial.

In response to this analysis and policy proposals by Prince Zeid, the UN has implemented and planned a variety of measures to prevent SEA, including:

- Amending the legal agreements with troop-contributing countries and contracts with all categories of peacekeeping personnel to include prohibitions on SEA.
- Investigating allegations of SEA abuse in ten missions, and establishing conduct and discipline units in eight.

- Briefing personnel at all levels on the problem, developing interagency networks to coordinate responses in the field, and creating a database to track misconduct in all missions.
- Developing compliance measures in missions, including the designation of “off-limits premises” and requiring military personnel to remain in uniform when off-base.
- Designing a policy on victim assistance and focal points on SEA within missions to work with local populations and facilitate the receipt of complaints.
- Handing over investigations into allegations to OIOS, which is also conducting a global review of the state of discipline in peace operations.
- Establishing a Group of Legal Experts to study means of strengthening criminal accountability of UN staff for crimes committed while serving in peacekeeping operations.

As of November 2005 these policies had resulted in 221 investigations of SEA, of which nearly half had resulted in the repatriation of military personnel or sacking of civilian staff.