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Press Conference

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PRESS CONFERENCE ON PEACEKEEPING MISCONDUCT ALLEGATIONS

Recent serious allegations of misconduct by peacekeepers in Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo showed that much work remained to be done to strengthen conduct policy, Assistant Secretary-General Jane Holl Lute told correspondents at a Headquarters press conference this afternoon.

“Zero tolerance means zero complacency. We will not be complacent in the face of serious allegations,” said Ms. Lute, who is Officer-in-Charge of the Department of Field Support, a new Department created to work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

She said that much of the work in assuring adherence to conduct and discipline standards, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse, had to be done in coordination with the troop-contributing countries. “We cannot do this alone. We rely deeply on the troop-contributing countries and the commitment of their national capitals to make this real and not just a theoretical exercise,” she stressed.

In that light, she announced an extraordinary meeting with troop-contributing countries to be held tomorrow, at which she would request the opportunity to visit their capitals to get their ideas in order to ensure that everyone was aware of what the standards

were, and that commanders were carrying out their responsibilities in order and discipline.

In general, she said, she was determined that all mission leadership would not set out for their duties without understanding very clearly their responsibilities for putting out the zero-tolerance message and putting in place the minimum standards in mission engagement: standard of conduct briefings; mandatory training; confidential complaint lines; curfews; no-go areas; and other measures.

In addition, she said that Member States had recently approved the establishment of a Conduct and Discipline Unit at Headquarters in her Department, and much work lay ahead in organizing that Unit. An anti-prostitution campaign had been developed and was now ready for testing in Timor-Leste.

Elsewhere, improvements had been made on the database for conduct and discipline issues, and steps had been taken to share information with the press and public in a more timely fashion, as well as to feed back information to local populations on disciplinary actions, now that troop-contributing countries were reporting the actions that had been taken after their nationals had been repatriated for disciplinary reasons.

She said the General Assembly was also considering a victim's assistance programme, proposed by the Secretary-General, and there was continuing work being done in the legal areas among other follow-ups to the report of Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan's adviser on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeeping personnel.

Regarding the allegations of sexual exploitation against the Moroccan contingent of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), which had been announced to the press on 20 July after a report on 16 July from UNOCI's Conduct and Discipline Team, she said that her office had had extensive consultations with Morocco, and expected a report from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), either later this week or early next week. The preliminary report, submitted by the UNOCI Conduct and Discipline Team, had shown a solid basis for investigation, she said in response to questions from the correspondents.

The entire unit had been confined to the barracks area and permitted off the compound only for essential operations during the day, and further action would be taken in consultation with Morocco once the OIOS report had been reviewed. She affirmed that Morocco was fully in agreement with the zero-tolerance policy and had cooperated completely with the investigations. The contingent was all male and it was not the first time a full unit had been confined during the course of an investigation, she said in response to other questions.

In regard to the allegations of corruption and human rights abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she said a management audit team had reviewed mission operations, OIOS had been in touch with Human Rights Watch to gain additional information and her office remained open to information from the press and any other credible sources: "We cannot be everywhere," she said.

Responding to correspondent's questions on actions taken by troop-contributing countries against individuals who have been repatriated for disciplinary infractions, Ms. Lute said that, although tracking of such information had improved, her office still needed to work on creating the right modality for sharing it with the press, and she did not have specific information on the fate of particular persons. She stressed that the United Nations had no way of punishing violators themselves, and there was, as yet, no legal requirement for troop-contributing countries to report punishments, with national sovereignty a major limitation in those areas and others.

In any case, she emphasized that punishment was not the major disincentive to misconduct -- maintaining the honour and valour of the vast majority of the 100,000 peacekeepers, as well as the reputation of the individual State's contingents, was the most important factor in maintaining discipline. "Purpose and pride" in peacekeeping was much more effective than rules and investigations, she said.

http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs//2007/070725_Lute.doc.htm