Senators Express Disgust Over Sex Crimes by UN Peacekeepers

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Republicans and Democrats on Wednesday decried an epidemic of sex crimes committed by [United Nations](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/world/united-nations.htm) peacekeepers and called on the [State Department](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/state-department.htm) to act more urgently to end the abuse by cutting off foreign aid to countries that won't hold their troops accountable.

At a Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., the panel's chairman, underscored his disgust for what he described as "moral depravity" by saying he'd rush home to North Chattanooga to protect his family if he learned that U.N. peacekeepers were being sent there.

U.S. laws make it unlikely that peacekeepers would ever be dispatched to the U.S.

The U.N. has long faced allegations of sexual abuses by its peacekeepers, especially those based in [Central African Republic](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/central-african-republic.htm) and Congo. The U.N. says there were 69 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers in 2015.

Corker and other senators also demanded to know why U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other senior U.N. officials have allowed the problem to fester. A 2005 U.N. report documented episodes of sexual exploitation and abuse, including the exchange of sex for small amounts of money or food. The United States, which is the largest financial contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations, should exercise its leverage more aggressively if the U.N. continues to drag its feet, they added.

"What is wrong with the Secretary-General of the U.N.?" Corker asked. "I mean is he just so inept that he can't (keep) this from happening over and over and over again? How do we put up with such inept leadership at the United Nations?"

Inaction by the U.N. coupled with spiraling budget deficits at home are a recipe for eroding U.S. support to peacekeeping operations, he said.

Isobel Coleman, the U.S. representative at the U.N. for management and reform, said it's not ineptitude but a reluctance by countries contributing troops to peacekeeping missions "to deal with this issue in the transparent way that it must be dealt with."

Corker and other committee members pressed State Department officials on whether they have used a U.S. human rights law known as the Leahy amendment to refuse foreign aid to countries whose peacekeepers sexually abused the people they were sent to protect.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Michael Rothstein of the department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs said he could not cite an instance of money being withheld. But he told the committee that the U.S. has only recently gotten the visibility into the crimes and the perpetrators that would allow them to block aid.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., echoed the senators' remarks after his House subcommittee that oversees the U.N. held a hearing Wednesday on the same subject.

"We must do everything we can to ensure that all U.N. peacekeepers are once again seen as protectors, not predators," Smith said.