UN Rights Chief Defends Suspension of Sex Abuse Whistleblower

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GENEVA—

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, says he stands by his decision to suspend a senior U.N. official who leaked confidential documents about the sexual abuse of children in Central African Republic. The human-rights chief says the suspended official breached U.N. rules aimed at protecting the identities and safety of victims, witnesses and investigators.

The high commissioner’s suspension of U.N. whistleblower Anders Kompass three weeks ago has set off a firestorm. Kompass leaked a confidential U.N. report to French authorities alleging that 14 French soldiers assigned to a peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic sexually abused a number of children between eight and 15 years of age.

The alleged abuses occurred over a seven-month period that ended nearly a year ago (from December 2013 to June 2014), yet none of the incidents were under investigation before Kompass leaked the report. A U.N. tribunal has ruled on Wednesday that his suspension was “prima facie unlawful,” and ordered the U.N. to reinstate Kompass, who is a Swedish national.

**‘I did not apologize’**

High Commissioner Zeid told VOA his office has implemented the judge’s order as directed.

“It does not mean that we accept all the reasoning. But we accept the order has to be complied with, and our view was, of course, part of the submission to the Tribunal.... No, I did not apologize to Anders Kompass. I think it was regrettable that, in one way, the burden of responsibility has almost shifted entirely onto the U.N,” said Zeid.

The high commissioner notes it is up to French authorities, not the United Nations, to investigate the sexual abuse of the children in C.A.R. since the crimes allegedly were committed by their national troops.

Zeid said he believes many people were aware of what was going on, but that the situation only came to light after the U.N. compiled information about the abuse incidents, and that eventually triggered a response.

He said the leaked version of the report included names of children who were victimized, and that French media have made public at least one victim's identity.

“We maintain that any disclosure of sensitive information and, where this is a risk to witnesses and victims - particularly child victims of sexual abuse - must be transferred, transmitted and conveyed properly. And if there is a view that it has been conveyed improperly, then clearly there is something that we need to examine,” said Zeid.

Anders Kompass is the director of field operations for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The U.N. tribunal that lifted his suspension said, in part, that it acted to avoid further damage to his reputation.

High Commissioner Zeid says he had a very long discussion with Kompass Friday, during which the agreed the work of the office was paramount, and that they will work together to further that.