UN Aid Worker Suspended for Leaking Report on Child Abuse by French Troops

April 29, 2015

By Sandra Laville

The Guardian

[http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/un-aid-worker-suspended-leaking-report-child-abuse-french-troops-car](https://mail.hrvoices.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=TirkieDgr02YAp6uT7GW2GB4Oi2iV9II86RrDYEnPPgHOfDDkAG28xWBDwOT0uIOpBHBaBN0-Lg.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.theguardian.com%2fworld%2f2015%2fapr%2f29%2fun-aid-worker-suspended-leaking-report-child-abuse-french-troops-car)

Anders Kompass said to have passed confidential document to French authorities because of UN’s failure to stop abuse of children in Central African Republic

A senior United Nations aid worker has been suspended for disclosing to prosecutors an internal report on the sexual abuse of children by French peacekeeping troops in the [Central African Republic](https://mail.hrvoices.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=TirkieDgr02YAp6uT7GW2GB4Oi2iV9II86RrDYEnPPgHOfDDkAG28xWBDwOT0uIOpBHBaBN0-Lg.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.theguardian.com%2fworld%2fcentral-african-republic).

Sources close to the case said Anders Kompass passed the document to the French authorities because of the UN’s failure to take action to stop the abuse. The report documented the sexual exploitation of children as young as nine by French troops stationed in the country as part of international peacekeeping efforts.

Kompass, who is based in Geneva, was suspended from his post as director of field operations last week and accused of leaking a confidential UN report and breaching protocols. He is under investigation by the UN office for internal oversight service (OIOS) amid warnings from a senior official that access to his case must be “severely restricted”. He faces dismissal.

The treatment of the aid worker, who has been involved in humanitarian work for more than 30 years, has taken place with the knowledge of senior UN officials, including Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the high commissioner for human rights, and Susana Malcorra, chef de cabinet in the UN, according to documents relating to the case.

The abuses took place in 2014 when the UN mission in the country, Minusca, was in the process of being set up.

The Guardian has been passed the internal report on the sexual exploitation by Paula Donovan, co-director of the advocacy group Aids Free World, who is demanding an independent commission inquiry into the UN’s handling of sexual abuse by peacekeepers.

It was commissioned by the UN office of the high commissioner for human rights after reports on the ground that children, who are among the tens of thousands displaced by the fighting, were being sexually abused.

Entitled Sexual Abuse on Children by International Armed Forces and stamped “confidential” on every page, the report details the rape and sodomy of starving and homeless young boys by French peacekeeping troops who were supposed to be protecting them at a centre for internally displaced people in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic.

Donovan said: “The regular sex abuse by peacekeeping personnel uncovered here and the United Nations’ appalling disregard for victims are stomach-turning, but the awful truth is that this isn’t uncommon. The UN’s instinctive response to sexual violence in its ranks – ignore, deny, cover up, dissemble – must be subjected to a truly independent commission of inquiry with total access, top to bottom, and full subpoena power.”

The UN has faced several scandals in the past relating to its failure to act over paedophile rings operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo and Bosnia. It has also faced allegations of sexual misconduct by its troops in Haiti, Burundi and Liberia.

The treatment of Kompass, a Swedish national, threatens to spark a major diplomatic row.

This month, the Swedish ambassador to the [United Nations](https://mail.hrvoices.org/owa/redir.aspx?C=TirkieDgr02YAp6uT7GW2GB4Oi2iV9II86RrDYEnPPgHOfDDkAG28xWBDwOT0uIOpBHBaBN0-Lg.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.theguardian.com%2fworld%2funitednations) warned senior UN officials “it would not be a good thing if the high commissioner for human rights forced” Kompass to resign. The ambassador threatened to go public if that happened and to engage in a potentially ugly and harmful debate.

The abuses detailed in the internal report took place before and after Minusca was set up last year. Interviews with the abused children were carried out between May and June last year by a member of staff from the office of the high commissioner for human rights and a Unicef specialist. The children identified represent just a snapshot of the numbers potentially being abused.

The boys, some of whom were orphans, disclosed sexual exploitation, including rape and sodomy, between December 2013 and June 2014 by French troops at a centre for internally displaced people at M’Poko airport in Bangui.

The children described how they were sexually exploited in return for food and money. One 11-year-old boy said he was abused when he went out looking for food. A nine-year-old described being sexually abused with his friend by two French soldiers at the IDP camp when they went to a checkpoint to look for something to eat.

The child described how the soldiers forced him and his friend to carry out a sex act. The report describes how distressed the child was when disclosing the abuse and how he fled the camp in terror after the assault. Some of the children were able to give good descriptions of the soldiers involved.

In summer 2014, the report was passed to officials within the office of the high commissioner for human rights in Geneva. When nothing happened, Kompass sent the report to the French authorities and they visited Bangui and began an investigation.

It is understood a more senior official was made aware of Kompass’s actions and raised no objections. But last month Kompass was called in and accused of breaching UN protocols by leaking details of a confidential report, according to sources.

Kompass’s emails have been seized as part of the investigation into the alleged leak. One senior UN official has said of Kompass that “it was his duty to know and comply” with UN protocols on confidential documents.

Bea Edwards, of the Government Accountability Project, an international charity that supports whistleblowers, condemned the UN for its witch-hunt against a whistleblower who had acted to stop the abuse of children.

“We have represented many whistleblowers in the UN system over the years and in general the more serious the disclosure they make the more ferocious the retaliation,” said Edwards. “Despite the official rhetoric, there is very little commitment at the top of the organisation to protect whistleblowers and a strong tendency to politicise every issue no matter how urgent.”

UN sources confirmed an investigation by the French was ongoing – in cooperation with the UN – into allegations of a very serious nature against peacekeepers in the Central African Republic.

On Wednesday the French government confirmed that authorities in Paris were investigating the allegations. A statement from the defence ministry said the government “was made aware at the end of July 2014 by the UN’s high commission for human rights of accusations by children that they had been sexually abused by French soldiers.”

An investigation was opened shortly after by Paris prosecutors, it said.

“The defence ministry has taken and will take the necessary measures to allow the truth to be found,” the statement added. “If the facts are proven, the strongest penalties will be imposed on those responsible for what would be an intolerable attack on soldiers’ values.”

The ministry said the abuse was alleged by around 10 children and reportedly took place at a centre for internally displaced people near the airport of the capital Bangui between December 2013 and June 2014.

The ministry said that French investigators had gone to the CAR from 1 August last year to begin their inquiry.

A spokesman for the UN office of the high commissioner for human rights confirmed an investigation was under way into the leaking of confidential information by a staff member.