UN received 54 allegations of sexual misconduct in 3 months

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The United Nations has long been in the spotlight over allegations of child rape and other sexual abuses by its peacekeepers, especially those based in Central African Republic and Congo. But the latest figures again suggest that sexual misconduct spans the entire U.N. system.

The U.N. said Tuesday it received 54 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation against U.N. peacekeepers and civilian staff and groups implementing U.N. programs in the first three months of 2018 — including one involving an 11-year-old girl.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said 14 allegations involved U.N. peacekeeping operations, 18 involved U.N. agencies, funds and programs, and 21 were related to U.N. partner organizations. One allegation involved a member of a non-U.N. international force operating under a U.N. Security Council mandate, he said.

Haq also the allegations involve 66 accusers, including 13 girls under age 18.

He said two women and one girl were pregnant, and paternity was established in one case.

The ages of 16 accusers were unknown, he added.

Haq said not all allegations from 2018 have been verified and many were being assessed.

He said two have been substantiated by an investigation; two were not substantiated; 21 are at various stages of investigation; 27 are under preliminary assessment; and one investigation’s result is under review.

Haq stressed, “With over 95,000 civilians and 90,000 uniformed personnel working for the U.N., sexual exploitation and abuse are not reflective of the conduct of the majority of the dedicated women and men who serve the organization.”

He continued, “But every allegation involving our personnel undermines our values and principles and the sacrifice of those who serve with pride and professionalism in some of the most dangerous places in the world.”

However, U.N. watchdogs remain skeptical about the organization’s answerability.

“The U.N.'s repeated claim of zero tolerance is a joke. In case after case, no one is held accountable. Peacekeepers from Ghana were accused of sexual exploitation in Wau in South Sudan but so far there is not accountability,” Matthew Russell Lee, founder of [Inner City Press](http://www.innercitypress.com/), which focuses on internal issues of the U.N., told Fox News. “Peacekeepers from Nepal were initially accused in South Sudan of child rape. Then the U.N. downgraded it to attempted sexual assault and has refused (our) questions about why it was downgraded, what definition they use.”

Hugh Dugan, who advised 11 U.S. ambassadors to the U.N. while serving as a U.S. delegate there from 1989 to 2015, said lecturing from the leaders of the U.N. for more than 20 years has not curbed abuse by peacekeepers, whose home countries rarely pursue charges against them.

“Retribution for victims is rarely if at all available through U.N. processes,” said Dugan, who currently serves as Sharkey Distinguished Visiting Scholar and Adjunct Professor at Seton Hall University’s School of Diplomacy and International Relations. “Here’s thinking out of the box: Might victims be so motivated to bring the first sexual abuse case to the International Criminal Court?  It was set up to prosecute individuals — not states — for the international crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes when national courts are unwilling or unable to prosecute criminals. Filing such a case would challenge the culture of wristslapping and impunity, which is likely to persist.”

Haq said there were no quarterly figures issued in 2017, but the first-quarter figures for 2018 appeared significantly higher, while the percentage of allegations involving peacekeepers was markedly lower at 26 percent.

In 2017, the United Nations received 138 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, some involving multiple perpetrators, and more than 40 percent arising from its peacekeeping missions, according to a U.N. report in March.

Secretary-General António Guterres said in the March report that much remained to be done “to ensure the United Nations has its own house in order” and his “zero tolerance” policy for sexual misconduct becomes a reality.

“No individual serving under the United Nations flag should be associated with sexual exploitation and abuse,” he said. “Combating this scourge continues to be one of my key priorities for 2018, as is assisting and empowering those who have been scarred by these egregious acts.”

Dugan added that whistleblower protection within the U.N. is at best fledgling.

“In the absence of concrete action to address such wrongdoing, the credibility of the United Nations as champion of human rights and human security is called-out — right under its own roof,” Dugan said. “While disciplinary measures against other U.N. employees might be meted out as an administrative matter, criminality is more challenging to address for abuses taking place in U.N. properties, which are technically international territories, and not within the jurisdiction of the United States or other host countries.”

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said tackling sexual abuse will be on the agenda of Guterres’ meeting in London on May 3-4 with his senior leadership and the heads of 31 U.N. agencies and specialized organizations. It is being hosted by the London-based International Maritime Organization.

Dujarric said Monday that Guterres would deliver “a strong message” to the U.N. Chief Executives Board “on the need to improve the U.N. system’s approach to preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace.”