



#PredatoryPeacekeepers - the importance of naming the problem (content note)

We were very pleased to see [Cathy Newman](#) cover the sexual abuse of vulnerable children perpetrated by UN peacekeeping troops in the Central African Republic and elsewhere:

...There were no fewer than 99 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by the “blue helmets” – as UN military personnel are nicknamed – last year, and there have been 25 new claims this year. And those are just the ones we know about.

What’s perhaps even more shocking is that this isn’t the first time such claims have surfaced about the [conduct of UN peacekeepers](#). There was an alleged [paedophile ring in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#), UN police officers in Bosnia were paying for prostitutes and trafficking young women from Eastern Europe, and Pakistani peacekeepers were found guilty of sexual abuse in Haiti. [There’s a track record going back decades](#). ...

It is absolutely essential to recognise that the sexualised violence perpetrated by UN peacekeeping troops in CAR is not an isolated event and that the UN has a culture of impunity which allows sexualised violence and other abuses of vulnerable people go unchallenged. We need more journalists with major media platforms reporting these abuses by UN staff - since it isn't just the peacekeeping forces who have behaved reprehensibly over the past 60 decades. However, we need to clear that the men who are raping children and women in CAR are making a choice to do so, which is we were disappointed by the conclusion to Newman's article:

The blunt truth is that the blue helmets are only as good as the countries they represent, and some of their own armies have appalling human rights records themselves. There are 100,000 peacekeepers drawn from across the globe and a sizeable minority are not going to pass muster.

You only end the abuse by changing the culture. Senior UN representatives and envoys are at the forefront of that endeavour. But foot soldiers drawn from countries which have been brutalised by war for decades can’t be relied upon to get with the programme.

The UN troops complicit in the sexualised violence and rape of children in CAR included French troops. The last time we checked, French troops aren't living in a country 'brutalised by war for decades'. Granted, France doesn't have the best track record in human rights - the Algerian War of Independence being a case in point, but blaming the country of origin for the behaviour of troops is to erase the personal responsibility of the men who choose to rape children whilst wearing a blue helmet. It implies that the troops complicit in sexualised violence in war zones are 'others' and sexualised violence wouldn't be a problem if the UN used troops from countries with good human rights records. We're struggling to find a country where the armed forces have never be complicit in the abuse and sexualised violence in war zones or even near military bases. Certainly, this would leave out the US due to sexualised torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib and the sheer number of rapes committed by American troops in Japan. The UK Armed Forces [train soldiers](#) from countries with appalling human rights records - and that is without



considering the behaviour of our own troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia.

UN soldiers and employees who rape and sexually abuse women, children and men, and commit other human rights atrocities do so within an organisation that has no oversight. Sexualised violence by UN employees is not limited to those drawn from countries 'brutalised by war for decades'. It is a consequence of the culture of impunity within the UN.

The UN needs to take responsibility for the actions of their employees and peacekeeping troops. The sexualised violence committed by these people will not stop until we name the problem: male violence, rape culture, and culture of impunity.