



PRESS RELEASE

United Nations to prioritize responsibility over sexual violence of children of international troops over prosecution of those informing prosecutors

Geneva, 1ST May 2015. Today, the leading global civil society coalition against torture calls for the UN to refocus its attention ensuring accountability for serious human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children. The comment comes in response to statement and media reports over the suspension of a senior UN human rights official for handing over a report of specific cases of sexual abuse of children by French international troops in the Central African Republic.

“The message that the UN is sending out in this case is deeply troubling”, said OMCT President Yves Berthelot. “We see silence on the issue of sexual violence by international troops that now serve under a UN mandate. And we see reprimanding a member of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for handing over a report to the competent investigating authorities in France”, he added.

Following the submission of the information to the French authorities by the human rights official a formal investigation was launched for the events that allegedly occurred between December 2013 and June 2014. It is the prime responsibility for the UN to support domestic investigations and to share credible information in its possession on criminal conduct and serious human rights violations to the relevant domestic authorities.

As an organization concerned with cases of torture and violence against children on a daily basis the OMCT is all too well aware of the prerogatives to protect witnesses and victims and to conduct child friendly investigations. We understand that both the French prosecuting authorities and the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic will have to do all to protect witnesses and victims in this case. This is particularly the case when the victims are children. This must be done, however, with the ultimate goal and effect of ensuring their right recognized by UN Conventions to an effective remedy and reparation.

The case in question reminds us all on the importance that those send to re-establish peace, security and the rule of law themselves apply the highest standards. Sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children in UN peacekeeping missions is a well-documented problem. Despite resolutions and new policy strategies it continues to benefit from near-total impunity.

The OMCT is concerned about the increased suffering of the victims in countries already traumatized with a neglect of the most fundamental rights but also with the credibility of UN and UN authorized peacekeeping missions.

“We have been concerned for long that a number of countries ‘reward’ their special forces responsible for serious human rights abuse at home with serving in international missions, such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The fact that it now concerns French troops shows that also western democracies are not immune from such risks”, said Yves Berthelot.

OMCT Vice President Dick Marty added: “In my experience documenting cases of whistleblowers, institutions are rarely accepting this qualification when it concerned its own staff. The UN appears not to be an exception here. What matters maybe most is that the UN cannot allow any ambiguity as to its commitment to fight sexual violence of children. It is urgent to correct this message!”

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