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# AP EXCLUSIVE: UN CHILD SEX RING LEFT VICTIMS BUT NO ARRESTS

BY PAISLEY DODDS  
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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- In the ruins of a tropical hideaway where jetsetters once sipped rum under the Caribbean sun, the abandoned children tried to make a life for themselves. They begged and scavenged for food, but they never could scrape together enough to beat back the hunger, until the U.N. peacekeepers moved in a few blocks away.



AP Photo/Dieu Nalio Chery

The men who came from a far-away place and spoke a strange language offered the Haitian children cookies and other snacks. Sometimes they gave them a few dollars. But the price was high: The Sri Lankan peacekeepers wanted sex from girls and boys as young as 12.

"I did not even have breasts," said a girl, known as V01 - Victim No. 1. She told U.N. investigators that over the next three years, from ages 12 to 15, she had sex with nearly 50 peacekeepers, including a "Commandant" who gave her 75 cents. Sometimes she slept in U.N. trucks on the base next to the decaying resort, whose once-glamorous buildings were being overtaken by jungle.

Justice for victims like V01 is rare. An Associated Press investigation of U.N. missions during the past 12 years found nearly 2,000 allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by peacekeepers and other personnel around the world - signaling the crisis is much larger than previously known. More than 300 of the allegations involved children, the AP found, but only a fraction of the alleged perpetrators served jail time.

Legally, the U.N. is in a bind. It has no jurisdiction over peacekeepers, leaving punishment to the countries that contribute the troops.

The AP interviewed alleged victims, current and former U.N. officials and investigators and sought answers from 23 countries on the number of peacekeepers who faced such allegations and, what if anything, was done to investigate. With rare exceptions, few nations responded to repeated requests, while the names of those found guilty are kept confidential, making accountability impossible to determine.

Without agreement for widespread reform and accountability from the U.N.'s member states, solutions remain elusive.

Here in Haiti, at least 134 Sri Lankan peacekeepers exploited nine children in a sex ring from 2004 to 2007, according to an internal U.N. report obtained by the AP. In the wake of the report, 114 peacekeepers were sent home. None was ever imprisoned.

In March, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced new measures to tackle sexual

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abuse and exploitation by U.N. peacekeepers and other personnel.

"Let us declare in one voice: We will not tolerate anyone committing or condoning sexual exploitation and abuse. We will not let anyone cover up these crimes with the U.N. flag," Guterres said.

But the proclamation had a depressingly familiar ring: More than a decade ago, the United Nations commissioned a report that promised to do much the same thing, yet most of the reforms never materialized.

For a full two years after those promises were made, the children in Haiti were passed around from soldier to soldier. And in the years since, peacekeepers have been accused of sexual abuse the world over.

In one particularly grim case in Haiti, a teenage boy said he was gang-raped in 2011 by Uruguayan peacekeepers who filmed the alleged assault on a cellphone. Dozens of Haitian women also say they were raped, and dozens more had what is euphemistically called "survival sex" in a country where most people live on less than \$2.50 a day, the AP found.

Haitian lawyer Mario Joseph has been trying to get compensation for victims of a deadly cholera strain linked to Nepalese peacekeepers that killed an estimated 10,000 people. Now, he is also trying to get child support for about a dozen Haitian women left pregnant by peacekeepers.

"Imagine if the U.N. was going to the United States and raping children and bringing cholera," Joseph said in Port-au-Prince. "Human rights aren't just for rich white people."

U.S. Sen. Bob Corker agrees. The Tennessee Republican, who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has been calling for reforms in the United Nations. He may well get them under President Donald Trump, whose administration has proposed a 31 percent reduction to the U.S. foreign aid and diplomacy budget. Corker and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley want a review of all missions.

Corker recalled his disgust at hearing of the U.N. sexual abuse cases uncovered last year in Central African Republic.

"If I heard that a U.N. peacekeeping mission was coming near my home in Chattanooga," he told AP, "I'd be on the first plane out of here to go back and protect my family."

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The Habitation Leclerc resort was once well known throughout Port-au-Prince as a lush refuge amid the capital's grimy alleyways. During its heyday in the 1980s, celebrities like Mick Jagger and Jackie Onassis would perch by the pool or stroll past the property's Voodoo temple.

By 2004, the resort was a decrepit clutch of buildings, and several children, either orphaned or abandoned by their parents, were living in its ruins.

It was there that V01 met other victims, two girls referred to in the U.N. report as "V02" and "V03" and a young boy, "V08." The boy initially supported them by occasionally bringing food from his aunt, but they were often hungry.

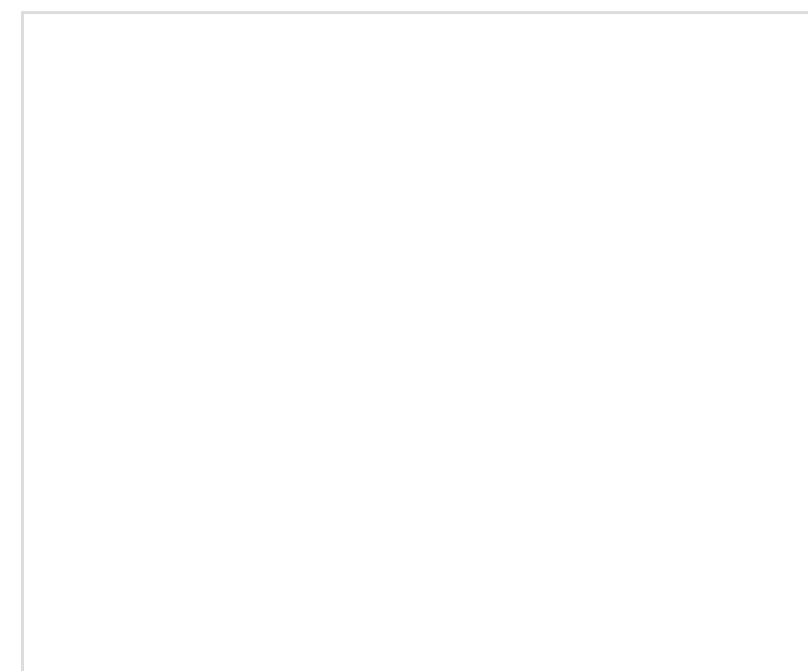
The peacekeepers had arrived that year as part of a new mission to help stabilize Haiti in the wake of President Jean-Bertrande Aristide's ouster. The Sri Lankans, numbering about 900 troops, landed in a historically unstable country in the grip of scattered violence and kidnappings - and a broken government ill-suited to confront the chaos.

Some of the peacekeepers in the Sri Lankan contingent were based near the former resort.

In August 2007, the U.N. received complaints of "suspicious interactions" between Sri Lankan soldiers and Haitian children. U.N. investigators then interviewed nine victims, as well as witnesses, while the sex ring was still active.

V02, who was 16 when the U.N. team interviewed her, told them she had sex with a Sri Lankan commander at least three times, describing him as overweight with a moustache and a gold ring on his middle finger. She said he often showed her a picture of his wife. The peacekeepers also taught her some Sinhalese so she could understand and express sexual innuendo; the children even talked to one another in Sinhalese when U.N. investigators were interviewing them.

V03 identified 11 Sri Lankan troops through photographs, one of whom she said was a corporal with a "distinctive" bullet scar between his armpit and waist. V04, who was 14, said she had



...with a distinctive bullet scar between his armpit and waist. V04, who was 17, said she had sex with the soldiers every day in exchange for money, cookies or juice.

During her interview with investigators, another young victim, V07, received a phone call from a Sri Lankan peacekeeper. She explained that the soldiers would pass along her number to incoming contingent members, who would then call her for sex.

The boy, V08, said he had sex with more than 20 Sri Lankans. Most would remove their name tags before taking him to U.N. military trucks, where he gave them oral sex or was sodomized by them.

Another boy, V09, was 15 when his encounters began. Over the course of three years, he said he had sex with more than 100 Sri Lankan peacekeepers, averaging about four a day, investigators said.

Under Haitian law, having sex with someone under 18 is statutory rape. U.N. codes of conduct also prohibit exploitation.

"The sexual acts described by the nine victims are simply too many to be presented exhaustively in this report, especially since each claimed multiple sexual partners at various locations where the Sri Lankan contingents were deployed throughout Haiti over several years," the report said.

Investigators showed the children more than 1,000 photographs that included pictures of Sri Lankan troops and locations of where the children had sex with the soldiers.

"The evidence shows that from late 2004 to mid-October 2007, at least 134 military members of the current and previous Sri Lankan contingents sexually exploited and abused at least nine Haitian children," the report said.

After the report was filed, 114 Sri Lanka peacekeepers were sent home, putting an end to the sex ring.

But the sexual exploitation visited upon Haiti's people didn't stop there.

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Janila Jean said she was a 16-year-old virgin when a Brazilian peacekeeper lured her to a U.N. compound three years ago with a smear of peanut butter on bread, raped her at gunpoint and left her pregnant. She finds herself constantly in tears.

"Some days, I imagine strangling my daughter to death," she said in an interview under the shadow of banana palms near the former Jacmel base.

With her were three other women who said they also were raped by peacekeepers. One of them sat on her heels, scraping coconut from its shell and into a large cauldron of water and corn, the barest of meals for the women and their small children.

Adm. Ademir Sobrinho of Brazil's armed forces said at a conference in London that his force had no such cases of rape, sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.

But like many, Jean didn't report the rape. Nearly a dozen women interviewed by the AP said they were too scared to report the crimes out of fear they would be blamed - or worse, would meet their victimizers again.

The AP found that some 150 allegations of abuse and exploitation by U.N. peacekeepers and other personnel were reported in Haiti alone between 2004 and 2016, out of the worldwide total of nearly 2,000. Aside from the Sri Lankan sex ring in Haiti, some perpetrators were jailed for other cases.

Alleged abusers came from Bangladesh, Brazil, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uruguay and Sri Lanka, according to U.N. data and interviews. More countries may have been involved, but the United Nations only started disclosing alleged perpetrators' nationalities after 2015.

The litany of abuses is long.

In July 2011, four Uruguayan peacekeepers and their commanding officer allegedly gang-raped a Haitian teenager. The men also filmed the alleged attack on their phones, which went viral on the internet. The men never faced trial in Haiti; four of the five were convicted in Uruguay of "private violence," a lesser charge. Uruguayan officials said at the time that it was a prank gone wrong and that no rape occurred.

The following year, three Pakistanis attached to the U.N.'s police units in Haiti were allegedly involved in the rape of a mentally disabled 13-year-old in the northern city of Gonaives.

U.N. officials went to Haiti to investigate, but the Pakistanis abducted the boy to keep him from detailing the abuse that had gone on for more than a year, according to Peter Gallo, a former U.N. investigator familiar with the case.

Finally, the men were tried in a Pakistani military tribunal, and eventually sent back to Pakistan. In theory, the tribunal could have allowed for better access to witnesses, but it's unclear whether any were called. The Pakistani authorities also refused to allow the U.N. to observe the proceedings. In the end, one man was sent to prison for a year, according to Ariane Quentier, a spokeswoman for the Haiti mission.

"It's an indictment of how the whole U.N. system works," Gallo told the AP.

Pakistan's military has refused several requests for comment on the case.

U.N. data during the 12-year period reviewed by AP is incomplete and varies in levels of detail, particularly for cases before 2010. Hundreds of other cases were closed with little to no explanation. In its review, the AP analyzed data from annual [reports](#) as well as information from the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

In the wake of the child sex ring investigation, a team of Sri Lankans spent two weeks in Haiti in October 2007. They interviewed only 25 soldiers out of more than 900 in the country and concluded that just two Sri Lankan corporals and one private had sex with two "young" victims. Three soldiers denied sexual encounters but were suspected of lying, according to the U.N. investigation report.

For six months, the Sri Lankan army and the government declined to respond to AP's questions about the 2007 case. Instead, officials first dodged repeated queries, then gave vague assurances that the scandal represented an isolated incident. Last month, the Sri Lankan government acknowledged its military had conducted inquiries into just 18 soldiers it said were implicated, and that "the U.N. Secretariat has acknowledged in writing, action taken by the Government, and informed that the Secretariat, as of 29 September 2014, considers the matter closed."

Some of the peacekeepers involved in the ring were still in the Sri Lankan military as of last year, Sri Lankan military officials say. The United Nations, meanwhile, continued to send Sri Lankan peacekeepers to Haiti and elsewhere despite corroborating the child sex ring.

Sri Lankan Defense Secretary Karunasena Hettiarachchi defended the troops, saying, "People are quite happy and comfortable with the peacekeepers."

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Above a rusty bench at an abandoned bus stop in the village of Leogane hangs a sign that reads, "Constructed by the 16th Sri Lanka Peacekeeping Battalion." It's one of the few physical reminders of the battalion's mission - along with children fathered by U.N. personnel.

Marie-Ange Haitis says she met a Sri Lankan commander in December 2006 and he soon began making night-time visits to her house in Leogane.

"By January, we had had sex," she said. "It wasn't rape, but it wasn't exactly consensual, either. I felt like I didn't have a choice."

She said when she first realized that she was pregnant, the Haitian translator assigned to the Sri Lankans told her to have an abortion. Then, she said, U.N. officials accused her of lying. As she spoke, her daughter Samantha sat on her lap wearing an oversized pair of sunglasses with a missing lens.

When she was interviewed in August, Haitis said she had been waiting nearly a decade for the U.N. to consider her paternity claim to help support her daughter.

Finally, early this year, Sri Lankan and U.N. officials told AP that a onetime payment of \$45,243 had been made for Haitis' daughter. The United Nations said Sri Lanka accepted the paternity claim without proof of DNA and the commander was dismissed from service.

But such payments are rare.

U.N. officials said they were unable to find any members of the mission in Haiti who might have dealt with the victims in the sex-ring case and did not know what happened to the children. An Italian non-governmental organization, AVSI, said it helped the children by trying



to find homes for them, providing them with counseling and helping reintegrate them into schools, but it also lost track of the children shortly after the country's devastating 2010 earthquake.

Atul Khare, the U.N.'s head of field support which oversees the conduct and discipline of peacekeepers, acknowledged the scope of the problem and said the global agency must do more to help victims, including gathering accurate information and following up with troop-contributing countries.

An AP review of reports into conduct on U.N. field missions showed haphazard record-keeping. In a 2008 report, for example, 19 allegations were reported in Haiti, but the U.N. recorded only two incidents worldwide involving minors - a seeming contradiction to the U.N.'s own investigation report in late 2007 that detailed the child sex ring with at least nine child victims.

Some Haitians wonder whether the U.N. has done more harm than good in a country that has endured tragedy after tragedy since it became the first black republic in 1804.

U.N. personnel say they have contributed to the stability in the Caribbean nation over the years, saved lives during the 2010 earthquake's aftermath and prevented violence during periods of unrest. The mission, which currently has nearly 5,000 personnel and is expected to scale down by October, has also been credited with training police, providing security during elections and support to the judiciary.

"I would not say we have achieved everything we set out to do, but we are engaged in a process of continuous improvement that any harmful effect on the local populations could be minimized, if not completely eradicated," Khare said.

Many here are not convinced.

"I'd like to see my attacker face to face and tell him how he has destroyed my life," said 21-year-old Melida Joseph, who said she was raped by one peacekeeper and narrowly escaped being gang-raped in Cite-Soleil, a seaside slum. Like others, she never reported the crime.

"They'll look at this as one big joke," she said. "As far as the U.N. goes, they came here to protect us, but all they've brought is destruction."

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Dodds reported from several locations in Haiti and London and Geneva. Others who contributed to the report were Katy Daigle in Colombo, Sri Lanka; Krista Larson in Dakar, Senegal; Kathy Gannon in Islamabad, Pakistan; Saleh Mwanamilongo in Kinshasa, Congo; Francis Kokutse in Accra, Ghana; Brahma Ouedraogo in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and Sylvester Domasa in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Eds: Peacekeepers as Predators: The U.N.'s sex abuse crisis, first in a series. With AP Photos

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