

Canada

**Criminal Accountability of United Nations
Officials and Experts on Mission
Canada, Australia and New Zealand Statement
(CANZ- Item 74)**

UNGA 77-Sixth Committee (October 2022)

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Mr. Chair,

I have the honour today of speaking on behalf of Australia, New Zealand, and my own country, Canada.

United Nations missions remain a critical tool to help countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace. We must do our part to ensure that these missions remain as effective as possible, faithfully serving the populations they are mandated to protect.

UN officials and experts who are on mission, including military, police, corrections officials and civilians - All playing an important role in creating the conditions for lasting peace, justice, and preservation of the rule of law.

We recognize the resilience that UN officials and experts on mission have demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to keep host communities safe and mitigate the spread of the virus. We commend their important work.

However, the deplorable acts of a few UN officials and experts, and the failure to hold them accountable for acts of wrongdoing, intensify and proliferate the suffering of the people they are mandated to assist and protect.

Allegations of criminal activities, including sexual exploitation and abuse; physical assaults; trafficking in persons and illicit narcotics; fraud; theft; and corruption, among others, inevitably serve to undermine the reputation, credibility, integrity and impartiality of both UN missions and of the United Nations as a whole.

CANZ countries recognize and reiterate our endorsement of the ongoing work of the United Nations to address this challenge. We wholeheartedly support the UN's zero-tolerance policy for criminal misconduct.

Equally, there is no place for sexual harassment, whether committed by UN representatives against vulnerable populations, or occurring within the UN system itself. CANZ countries encourage the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts to condemn and address incidents of sexual harassment within the UN system.

Mr. Chair,

Prevention is key: The careful vetting and training of UN officials and experts prior to their deployment is essential, to both prevent and address any incidents of misconduct or criminal activity. We must also encourage reporting and create a safe space for victims, survivors and witnesses to come forward in such instances.

CANZ countries thank the Secretary-General for continuing to lead efforts to encourage the adoption of policies promoting the reporting of criminal acts, their timely and thorough investigation within the UN system, the protection of victims and survivors, and the prompt notification of the deploying Member State when allegations of such incidents are presented. Furthermore, when such allegations do surface, we must ensure that where immunities apply, they are not used as a shield to protect perpetrators from full accountability for their actions.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his latest report. We endorse the recommendation and continue to encourage UN bodies and agencies to adopt coherent policies for the proper investigation of misconduct allegedly committed by UN personnel who fall outside the scope of General Assembly resolutions pertaining to UN officials and experts on mission. This will send a strong signal that there is no place for criminal misconduct anywhere within the UN system. CANZ countries continue to stand at the ready to do our part in this regard.

We note that the Secretary-General's report lists nineteen new allegations of criminal misconduct for the 2021-2022 period, bringing the total number of Member State referrals to 331 since July 1st, 2007. We note with regret and concern that for the majority of these allegations, no information was received from the Member State regarding the status of any investigations or prosecutions. We encourage all Member States to address their internal domestic challenges and provide relevant information to the Secretary-General in support of these investigations, to the extent possible.

Mr. Chair,

Through these shared and collective efforts, we must not lose sight of the victims and survivors who have been most impacted by criminal wrongdoing.

Almost three years into COVID-19, this pandemic has shown all of us that major disruptions in our society serve to both exacerbate existing inequalities, and further increase risks – including the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse – faced by vulnerable and marginalized populations.

The UN and its Member States must continue to strengthen their mechanisms for both preventing and responding to criminal wrongdoing. It is essential, both individually and collectively, that we build a culture which is genuinely supportive of victims, survivors, witnesses, and other individuals who come forward to report criminal allegations and misconduct. To this end, we are encouraged that the UN system has strengthened its efforts to prioritize victims' and survivors' rights, and has been receptive to hearing them out.

UN support in this regard must include transparent and timely responses to allegations and a greater visibility for victim and survivor support services in the field. To help remove barriers that discourage the reporting of misconduct, we must ensure that appropriate safeguards exist to prevent any forms of reprisal against those who report or witness misconduct.

Mr. Chair,

CANZ countries continue to support, in principle, the proposal for a convention that would serve to address issues related to the exercise of jurisdiction by Member States over nationals who participate in UN operations abroad. Australia, New Zealand and Canada consider the issue of appropriate accountability for criminal activities committed under the auspices of the United Nations, whether on mission or otherwise, to be of the utmost importance.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.