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# UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,  
UNGA77, AGENDA ITEM 74

CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF UN OFFICIALS AND EXPERTS ON MISSION

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Delivered by Jonathan Hollis

*Check against delivery*

Mr/Madam Chair, thank you for today's discussion.

Tackling impunity and promoting accountability are priorities for the United Kingdom. We want to see a United Nations that in the first instance, prevents criminality from taking place and enforces UN standards of conduct, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse. But when prevention is not possible, there must be remedial action. A true zero-tolerance policy.

There are three points I would like to make today.

First, this is a system-wide problem that can only be addressed through a system-wide approach. Abuse, whether committed by a peacekeeper or an official in one of the UN's agencies, funds or programmes, is of equal magnitude of seriousness and requires an equal level of oversight and accountability. Lessons should be drawn from across the humanitarian, aid and peacekeeping sectors to build a more robust and coherent system.

That is why at the May 2022 Strategic Dialogue on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, the United Kingdom and 64 other Member States collectively expressed their support for the Secretary-General's ambition to create a global framework to drive transformational, systemic and long-term change on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The United Kingdom is developing proposals for what such

a framework might look like and we are happy to share with anybody who is interested – we are keen to support a global dialogue on this issue.

Second, the relevant States must have the ability to exercise jurisdiction as appropriate. The priority finding of the group of legal experts on accountability in 2006 was that the United Nations should prioritise the facilitation of the exercise of jurisdiction by the host State. And, where the host State is unable, for other States to act, including through extraterritorial jurisdiction.

We encourage all relevant States to exercise their jurisdiction where possible to ensure crimes are investigated and, where appropriate, perpetrators prosecuted for offences. This includes where Member States exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction over acts committed by their nationals abroad, as the United Kingdom does through the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) for sexual offences committed by its nationals outside the UK.

The UK is also working with host States to support capacity building, including funding INTERPOL's Project Soteria. Soteria looks to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement to investigate, prosecute and arrest perpetrators.

And finally, my last point. We want to see a United Nations that prioritises the rights and dignity of victims, survivors and whistle-blowers. We welcome the work of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Senior Victims'

Rights Officers working in the field to support victims on the ground, including strengthening reporting mechanisms to raise concerns.

But those individuals who do come forward to report crimes and wrongdoing must also be supported. The United Kingdom is deeply concerned to hear reports of mistreatment of whistle-blowers in the UN system. Whistle-blowing and protection against retaliation are essential for accountability; when responses are inadequate, or where systems are weak, personnel are deterred from coming forward to report misconduct.

Colleagues, while I am pleased that this important discussion is taking place in the Sixth Committee, it is disheartening that we still need to have these conversations. It is sixteen years since the group of legal experts' report, yet many of the same challenges remain. Accountability is still lacking. Officials and experts on mission commit crimes because they believe they can act with impunity

We all share the responsibility to ensure accountability across the United Nations system, let us work together to tackle these important issues.

Thank you.