

Seventy-eighth Session
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Sixth Committee
Agenda item 76
Criminal accountability of UN officials and experts on mission
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries

Mr./Mrs. Chair,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden – and my own country, Norway.

We applaud the important work of UN officials and experts on missions across the world. It is essential that these officials and experts hold high standards of integrity, which the vast majority of them do.

However, the issue of criminal accountability of UN officials and experts on mission remains of critical importance.

Criminal actions carried out by UN officials and experts are not acceptable. These crimes must be investigated and prosecuted, both for the sake of the victims of the crimes and for the credibility and integrity of the UN System. The UN and its Member States must maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards such crimes, through preventive measures, legislation, and action.

The Nordic countries welcome the Secretary General's latest reports under this topic (A/78/275 and A/78/248). In line with the Secretary General's recommendation, the Nordic countries continue to encourage the distinct legislative bodies of the United Nations system and related organizations to help ensure the coherence and coordination of relevant policies and procedures.

We are deeply concerned by the reports of criminal conduct by UN officials and experts on mission. The overview of all reported cases since 2007 currently shows 342 allegations of serious criminal offences committed by UN officials or experts on mission referred to the Member States. 11 of these cases, were reported during the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. We are pleased to see a decrease from the previous reporting year, which we hope is a result of the continued efforts taken by the Secretary General along with Member States. However, this is 11 cases too many.

The Nordic countries express particular concern about allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. Between 1 July 2017 and 30 June 2023, 26 credible allegations of such crimes committed by United Nations officials and experts on mission were referred to their States of nationality, and we cannot dismiss the possibility of a significant number of unreported cases. These numbers underscore the continued importance of focusing on this matter. They also demonstrate the significance of the measures initiated by the UN over the past years to root out sexual exploitation and abuse in UN structures and operations. The Nordic countries fully support the Secretary-General's strategy to improve the organisation's system-wide approach to preventing and responding to such exploitation and abuse.

The last two years, the numbers of reported allegations of sexual offences have been two cases per year, which is lower than previous years. This is a positive development, and we believe that, with continuous joint efforts, we can bring the visions behind the zero-tolerance policy into reality.

The Nordic countries are also concerned by the persistent high number of crimes for profit, such as fraud, corruption, and theft. We condemn the reprehensible nature of these crimes, which exploit and damage operations and programmes initiated to aid people in dire need of help. These crimes ultimately exploit some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

Mr./Mrs. Chair,

Too many Member States fail to respond adequately to cases of misconduct and crimes referred to them. This lack of response is unacceptable. The Member States have the primary responsibility for addressing the serious issue of accountability of UN officials and experts on mission.

As the list of referred cases lengthens, without Member States providing the necessary information on their follow-up at the national level, the pressure against the UN and its Member States to address this serious problem increases. The Nordic countries therefore strongly encourage States that have not provided the required information regarding these cases to do so. We also underline the need for all Member States to take the necessary legislative steps to establish jurisdiction over crimes committed by their nationals while serving as UN officials or experts on mission.

All Member States must uphold the principles of due process and the rule of law when investigating and prosecuting these cases. It is equally important that all Member States ensure the effective protection of victims, witnesses, and whistle-blowers.

The Nordic countries urge all Member States that have not yet done so to submit, at their earliest convenience, relevant information to the Secretary-General regarding the status of their domestic legislation on this matter, in accordance with paragraphs 28 and 29 of resolution 77/98.

Mr./Mrs. Chair,

In closing, the Nordic countries would like to reiterate the importance of ensuring accountability for crimes committed while in service for the UN.

We look forward to a constructive debate in the future on a comprehensive international legal framework to address criminal conduct of UN officials and experts on mission. This could be an important step towards fighting impunity. We would once again like to thank the Group of Legal Experts for the Draft Convention.

As for Member States' willingness and ability to hold their own nationals accountable for crimes committed while in UN service, nothing less than full transparency is acceptable. We remain ready to consider all measures that can be taken to ensure accountability, fight impunity and strengthen the follow-up of these cases.

I thank you.