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CANZ statement delivered by Fergus Ewington, Policy Support Officer, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations

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

The work of UN officials and experts on mission is crucial to creating the conditions for lasting peace, and an environment where rule of law is respected and upheld. Tens of thousands of individuals from across the globe work tirelessly every day to deliver lifesaving humanitarian assistance and support sustainable development, and in doing so make an invaluable contribution to international peace and security.

The UN and its Member States provide trust and support to these individuals to undertake the work required to advance the principles and purpose of the United Nations – work which requires the highest standards of integrity, as provided for by Article 101 of the UN Charter. We commend the vast



majority of UN officials and experts on mission who conduct themselves in accordance with these standards and thank them for their work.

However, criminal acts of a small number of officials and experts can inflict devastating harm on the individuals and communities they have been mandated to protect. These acts of a minority, and the associated failures to hold perpetrators to account, undermine the reputation, credibility, integrity and impartiality of UN missions and the United Nations system as a whole – the very system we rely on to bring support to people in some of the most vulnerable situations in the world.

We reiterate our unwavering support for a zero-tolerance policy of criminal activities of UN officials and experts on mission, including with respect to sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, corruption, fraud and other financial crimes. Impunity for such acts cannot be tolerated. To this end, it is vital that we strengthen reporting mechanisms and whistleblower protections, particularly by ensuring appropriate safeguards against retaliation. While we acknowledge the progress that has been made on this front, we remain concerned that criminal acts continue to occur on mission, and urge the UN and its Member States to take strong action to work towards preventing and, ultimately, eradicating to such conduct.



We commend the UN's commitment to transparency and reporting on wrongdoing within its organisational structure, and welcome the opportunity to further reflect on and improve policies and procedures in order to address disparities. Gaining a greater understanding of all aspects of this issue is critical to strengthen existing systems and bring about lasting change.

With this in mind, we welcome the Secretary-General's latest report summarising relevant policies and procedures relating to the reporting, investigation, referral and follow-up of credible allegations of criminal conduct by UN officials and experts on mission. We acknowledge the Secretary-General's recommendation that Member States should continue to encourage the distinct legislative bodies of the UN system and related organizations to help ensure coherence and coordination of reporting, investigation, referral and follow-up policies and procedures. We encourage all Member States to re-commit to these efforts and welcome further reporting from the Secretary-General on any progress made on strengthening existing internal networks, policies and procedures, including enhanced cooperation on cross-cutting issues.



So far this year, 70 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel on peacekeeping and special political missions have been reported to the UN. This number remains unacceptably high. It is essential that all allegations are investigated in an impartial, thorough and timely manner, and that substantiated cases are appropriately dealt with, whether through disciplinary measures or through referral to home states.

CANZ also recognizes that we, as Member States, have a crucial role to play. We encourage all states to investigate allegations of criminal misconduct of their nationals, cooperate with other states and international bodies as needed, and ensure that domestic systems work effectively to hold perpetrators to account. We support, in principle, the exercise of jurisdiction over serious crimes committed by their nationals while serving as UN officials and experts on mission. We reiterate that the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute credible allegations of criminal misconduct by UN officials and experts on mission rests with the State of nationality of the alleged perpetrator.

We support the continuous updating to the table of national provisions regarding Member States' exercise of jurisdiction over their nationals for relevant criminal offences. We encourage all Member States to contribute to



this table to provide a better understanding of where there is progress and where gaps remain.

These accountability mechanisms are crucial to ensuring an end to impunity for criminal acts of UN officials and experts on mission. However, it is equally important that we strengthen preventative actions, including by improving existing screening and vetting measures and pre-deployment training before sending personnel on missions. We support the UN and Secretary-General's focus on reinforcing such measures, and again recognise the vital role of Member States in this regard. States need to do more to prevent and respond to misconduct and crimes committed by their nationals by instilling a zero-tolerance culture for sexual exploitation and abuse, and all other criminal acts.

We encourage Member States to work together to establish standards for enhancing screening mechanisms for UN officials and experts being deployed on mission. We also welcome further discussions on the proposal for a convention that would require Member States to exercise criminal jurisdiction over their nationals participating in UN operations abroad.



In closing, Australia, Canada and New Zealand reaffirm our unwavering commitment to ensuring accountability for criminal conduct of UN officials and experts on mission, which undermine the vital work and objectives of the United Nations system.

Thank you.