UN Peacekeepers in C. Africa Hit By New Sex Allegations

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By AFP

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The UN mission in the Central African Republic was hit with new allegations Wednesday that its peacekeepers sexually abused several women and girls, some of whom are now pregnant.

"MINUSCA was informed today of allegations involving five women that had sexual relations with peacekeepers. Three of them were under 18," said a UN official who asked not to be named.

A team from the mission will be dispatched Thursday to Bambari, north of the capital Bangui, to collect information following the allegations involving troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Two of the five women became pregnant as a result of the relations with the peacekeepers over several months, said the official.

The 12,000-strong MINUSCA force has faced a string of allegations of misconduct and sexual abuse with victims as young as 11.

Three months ago, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon took the unprecedented step of firing the mission chief over the wave of accusations, but several new allegations have surfaced since then.

In a statement, current MINUSCA chief Parfait Onanga-Anyanga "condemned such acts as completely unacceptable" and vowed to "take swift and appropriate measures should the allegations be substantiated."

Onanga-Anyanga stressed that "any single incident of abuse is utterly abhorrent."

It was at least the second time that troops from the Democratic Republic of Congo were accused of misconduct in the UN mission.

In August, three young women, one of whom was a minor, accused the Congolese soldiers of rape and Kinshasa said they would face trial.

Under UN rules, it is up to the troop-contributing country to investigate and prosecute soldiers accused of misconduct while serving under the UN flag.

The MINUSCA force, which took over from an African Union mission in September 2014, has been plagued by a series of allegations involving its peacekeeping forces.

The Central African Republic is struggling to recover from sectarian violence that exploded after a 2013 coup, pitting mainly Muslim rebels against Christian militias.