Sex Scandals, Food Theft and Weapons Smuggling - What the UN Wishes You Didn't Know

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By Samantha Spooner

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<http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-05-13-just-another-day-at-the-office-what-the-united-nations-wishes-you-did-and-didnt-know>

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FOUNDED in 1945 as the dust settled following the end of the devastating World War 2, the United Nations (UN) was created to take on issues confronting humanity. These included; peace, security, climate change, sustainable development, human rights, humanitarian emergencies, gender equality, governance, food production, and more.

The organisation has had its fair share of successes. It [has](http://newshour-tc.pbs.org/newshour/extra/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2014/03/un_sh_background.pdf) negotiated 172 peace settlements that have ended regional conflicts and is credited with participation in over 300 international treaties on topics as varied as human rights conventions to agreements on the use of outer space and the oceans. In its humanitarian efforts, more than 30 million refugees fleeing war, persecution, or famine have received aid from the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

Recently however, a case came to light that reveals a shady side to the organisation. Late in April French defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, received a leaked UN report detailing sexual assaults by French troops which reportedly took place between December 2013 and June 2014 at a centre for displaced people in the Central African Republic (CAR). The French troops had been deployed alongside UN-mandated European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) peacekeeping missions.

**Burying a report**

In this case, even though none of the accused troops were under UN command, flags were raised questioning the UN’s actions since it appeared that the organisation was trying to bury an internal report detailing the abuses. Victims had been interviewed in May and June 2014, but when the UN had still not taken action a year later, a high-ranking UN official gave the report - titled “Sexual Abuse on Children by International Armed Forces” - to the French authorities.

Anders Kompass, the Swedish UN official who leaked the report, has since been suspended for sharing confidential information and breaching UN protocol.

This case echoes shocking atrocities committed by Belgian paratroopers in 1993 under a UN Somalia Peace mission - “Operation Restore Hope”. Fifteen paratroopers were put on trial for other abuses during the UN mission, including torture, killings and the mock-execution of children. Most were acquitted. Photographs [documenting](http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9704/17/belgium.somalia/) the abuse were only revealed in 1997.

**Peacekeepers headache**

The UN has a zero-tolerance policy for abuse, but the organisation has for decades suffered in dealing with misconduct - particularly in relation to peacekeeping forces. Official UN statistics [show](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_05_08_savethechildren.pdf) a higher incidence of allegations reported against peacekeeping forces than any other UN staff.

Critics say that the reason for this is that there is still not enough pressure on countries that contribute peacekeeping troops to punish those responsible for abuse, making it all the more shocking that, despite knowing about the alleged French peacekeeper abuse, the UN had not immediately dealt with it.

Whistleblower website, [Wikileaks](https://www.wikileaks.org/index.en.html), has revealed internal reports of some of this misconduct by UN workers and, predominantly, peacekeepers.

In 2005, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (UN OIOS) filed a report titled “Investigation into alleged theft of UN food rations by two senior officials of member state 1 aviation unit”, relating to the United Nations Mission in Liberia. It was discovered that military officers had misappropriated UN-owned food that was for the sole use of the mission, selling it to a local vendor.

Food is not the only thing being misappropriated under the UN’s watch. In July 2007, UN OIOS issued a report titled “Investigation: Exploitation of Natural Resources and the Trafficking of Weapons in the Mongbwalu Region”, which related to the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). The report found that peacekeepers deployed to Mongbwalu, the centre of a gold mining concession controlled by a state owned gold company, were involved in the exploitation of local gold reserves.

The peacekeepers had provided transport, meals and security for foreign businessmen during their visits to Mongbwalu, purchasing significant quantities of unwrought gold without the appropriate government authorisations. The link between the illegal exploitation of natural resources and trafficking in raw material and arms, has been well documented in the reports of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Also in the DRC, a wikileak revealed a 2006 report by the Investigations Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services detailing the deployment of investigators to Bunia, the capital of Ituri Province which is in the northeast area of the DRC, to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers.

**Sexual exploitation rampant**

UN OIOS investigated 72 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and issued reports to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and MONUC on 20 individual cases, 19 of which involved military personnel. Six allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were substantiated and investigations indicated that peacekeepers had also frequented prostitutes who are Congolese girls.

Sexual allegations are rampant. Save the Children investigated allegations of sex with minors against staff from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DKPO), the World Food Program (WFP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

These were alleged to have take place between 2004 and 2006 in Southern Sudan, Côte d’Ivoire and Haiti. [The report](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_05_08_savethechildren.pdf) was published in 2008. In 2005, the number of allegations of sex with minors reported against staff from DPKO alone stood at 60.

Cote d’Ivoire has been a country of particular scrutiny. In relation to the Save the Children report, a 2010 US Embassy cable released by wikileaks claimed that United Nations peacekeepers in the country had indeed traded food for sex with underage girls. It stated that ten underage girls, when asked, eight of them said they had performed sexual favours with Beninese peacekeepers in exchange for food and lodging.

United Nations spokesman Michel Bonnardeaux confirmed that 16 Beninese peacekeepers were sent back to Benin and barred from service after an investigation confirmed the exploitation.

**Boutros-Ghali case**

Shady dealings are known to however climb the ranks of the UN, (for example of the 16 peacekeepers sent back ten were commanders and the rest were soldiers) but there is one unrelated case that stands out in particular.

In a book by Linda Melvern titled “A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda’s Genocide”, former UN secretary general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali admits his role in approving an initial $5.8 million arms deal in 1990, which led to Egypt supplying arms to Rwanda until 1992.

He says he approved it because it was his job as Foreign Minister to sell weapons for Egypt. The deal however was never disclosed.

The weapons were smuggled into Rwanda disguised as relief material, and during his term as secretary general of the UN the Rwandan genocide broke out. The arms were [allegedly](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/sep/03/unitednations1) used by Hutus in the attacks, which led to up to a million deaths, and the UN was heavily criticised for its inaction during the crisis.