**Alleged fraud involving UN troops in DRCongo, Haiti probed**

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UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The United Nations said Tuesday it was probing allegations of fraud and mismanagement in procurement affecting its peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Haiti.

UN spokeswoman Michele Montas was commenting on a report in The Washington Post alleging that a UN task force had uncovered case of "fraud, corruption, waste and mismanagement both at UN headquarters and peacekeeping missions "with aggregate value in excess of 610 million dollars."

She noted that the investigation by the task force "was initiated on the UN side."

"We're concerned about the allegations in the (Washington Post) article, we want these allegations to be fully investigated and where appropriate to have criminal references made," US Ambassador to the UN Zalmay Khalilzad told reporters.

"We are very much committed to a procurement process that is open and transparent and efficient," he added. "And we support very much the continued work of the task force that has uncovered some of the irregularities, improprieties in the article."

"The case of staff members accused of wrongdoing in connection with procurement exercises in MINUSTAH (the 9,200-strong UN mission in Haiti) and MONUC (the 18,630-strong UN mission in DRC) are under consideration in the internal justice system in accordance with established procedures," Montas said.

She added that the cases "are being accorded the highest priority" but that the world body was not in a position to comment any further at this stage.

"We are well aware that there have been problems in procurement," Montas said. "This is why we are moving full steam ahead with procurement reform in order to have a system that is much tighter and transparent, leaving less room for abuse."

The latest allegations, which followed previous UN procurement corruption scandals including one linked to the oil-for-food program for Iraq, surfaced just as the world body is trying to agree its two-year budget which the United States views as too high.

The UN General Assembly's budgetary panel set a Wednesday deadline to approve a request by UN chief Ban Ki-moon for a two-year budget of 4.2 billion dollars (2.95 billion euros).

"Certainly the budget as proposed is too high," Khalilzad said last week. "We would like to see where savings can be made. We are discussing with other major donors and others with influence over the membership of the United Nations."

Last August, five MONUC employees were suspended following irregularities in procurement practices uncovered by the Office of Internal Oversight Services Internal, the UN's investigative arm, the UN mission said Kinshasa.

Since 2004, MONUC has brought to light more than 140 cases of sexual abuse by MONUC peacekeepers, dozens of whom have been repatriated to their respective countries.