

Former UN envoy urges continued vigilance in fight against sexual exploitation and abuse

5 July 2017 – While a number of steps have been taken to address the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), the former deputy head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (CAR) has urged continued vigilance to ensure that the world body's personnel do no harm while carrying out their duties.

"We can never take anything for granted. Every day, every step of the way, every time we set up a new mission, every time you deploy a new contingent, you've got to put in place the measures that are going to stamp out SEA. And we've got to keep doing it," said Diane Corner.

Since 2014, Ms. Corner, a British national, served as the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR ([MINUSCA](#)).

The past few years have been particularly challenging for the CAR, a country of 4.5 million people that was plunged into civil conflict in 2013. According to the UN, more than half the population is in dire need of assistance. Despite significant progress and successful elections, CAR has remained in the grip of instability and sporadic unrest.

In addition, MINUSCA – which was deployed with the aim of protecting civilians, supporting the transition process and facilitating humanitarian assistance, among other tasks – has been dealing with numerous allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by its personnel.

"It was a huge shock to the Mission," Ms. Corner recalled in an interview with UN News upon the completion of her assignment, adding that it "really turned us upside down" in the way it approached the problem.

"I insisted that we should be transparent. I insisted that we should try and adopt a victim-centred approach. I say try because, in a country like the Central African Republic, there's not much by way of provision for anybody actually, anybody in need. So you have to do your best to use the services that were available and maximize that."

In the wake of the allegations that arose in CAR, as well as in other missions, the UN took a number of measures to prevent such abuses; to respond quickly and effectively to allegations that come to light; to protect and support victims; and to demand zero impunity – recognizing that in the case of uniformed personnel, accountability is a shared responsibility requiring action by Member States.

Ms. Corner noted that what happened in CAR prompted the UN system as a whole

to address the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse in “a completely different way” now.

“So if there’s any good that’s come out of this, it’s the fact that the chances of it happening again are reduced but I think we need to be constantly vigilant,” she stressed. “We can never take anything for granted.

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VIDEO: The former deputy chief of the UN mission in CAR, Diane Corner, listed highlights during her tenure, including Pope Francis’ visit and the country’s elections.

Ms. Corner also pointed out that it makes a “huge difference” having women in leadership positions in the UN. “Obviously, you see things differently,” she noted. “Not to say that there aren’t some men who’ve been fantastic champions of the fight against SEA, and we’ve had some of them in our mission as well.

“I think women have more of an understanding of what it means for the victims, and maybe have more of an insight as to how to have a more holistic response to ensure that we really are taking this seriously and that we’re doing everything that we can.”

She added that often the protagonists and the combatants are men, while women are the ones who suffer. “We’ve seen in CAR for example, that between communities, when there are problems, when there are tensions, it’s very often the women coming back together again who re-create the bonds between communities.

“And I think women take... a longer-term view because they think of the coming generation, of their children, and so they’ll really invest in trying to ensure that peace is restored, that they can look after their families,” she stated.

“I just think that they can be a very powerful force for good.”

Ms. Corner added that the importance of MINUSCA cannot be overstated. “In CAR, if MINUSCA wasn’t there, you would’ve had a genocide,” she stated.

“In my mind, there’s no doubt we’ve saved tens and tens of thousands of lives in CAR, no doubt at all.”