

Seventy-sixth Session
12 October 2021
Sixth Committee
Agenda item 79

Criminal accountability of UN officials and experts on mission
Statement by Norway on behalf of the Nordic countries

Thank you, Madam Chair,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden – and my own country, Norway.

The issue of criminal accountability of UN officials and experts on mission continues to be of critical importance.

Criminal actions carried out by UN officials and experts cannot be tolerated. The UN and its Member States must exercise a zero-tolerance policy towards crimes committed by UN officials and experts on mission, through preventive measures, legislation, and action. For the sake of the victims of such crimes and for the credibility and integrity of the UN and its missions, these crimes must be investigated and prosecuted.

In this respect, the Nordic countries welcome the Secretary General's report on the policies and procedures of UN entities regarding credible allegations revealing that UN officials or experts may have committed a crime. We also reiterate our support of the Secretary General's recommendation that Member States continue encouraging the distinct legislative bodies of the UN system and related organizations to help ensure the coherence and coordination of relevant policies and procedures.

Furthermore, we welcome the Secretary General's report submitted under the present agenda item, which provides valuable information on Member States' reporting on, and national follow-up of, cases of criminal offences committed by UN officials or experts on mission.

Unfortunately, the report bears witness of an alarming and unacceptable development. The overview of all reported cases since 2007 currently shows 286 allegations of serious criminal offences committed by UN officials or experts, referred to the Member States. 67 of these cases, almost a quarter of the total number of offences since 2007, were reported during the period of 1st of July 2020 to 30th of June 2021.

The Nordic countries are particularly concerned by the allegations of sexual exploitations and abuse. Between 1st of July 2016 and 30th of June 2021, 24 credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by UN officials and experts were referred to their States of nationality. Five of these cases occurred over the last reporting year. This high number confirms yet again the importance of the measures the UN has initiated to root out sexual exploitation and abuse from UN structures and operations over the past few years. The Nordic countries reiterate our support of the ongoing work of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations' response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and the Secretary-General's strategy to improve the organisation's system-wide approach to preventing and responding to such exploitation and abuse.

Madam Chair,

Unfortunately, too many Member States fail to respond adequately to cases referred to them. This lack of response is not acceptable. As the list of referred cases of this kind lengthens drastically, without Member States providing the necessary information on their follow-up at the national level, the pressure against the UN and its Member States to address this serious problem increases. The Nordic countries therefore strongly encourage States that have not provided the required information regarding these cases to do so.

Member States have the primary responsibility for addressing the serious issue of accountability of UN officials and experts on mission. All Member States must establish jurisdiction over crimes committed by their nationals, while serving as UN officials or experts on mission.

When investigating and prosecuting these cases, all Member States must uphold the principles of due process and the rule of law. Moreover, it is equally important that all Member States ensure the effective protection of victims, witnesses, and whistle-blowers.

The Nordic countries once again urge all Member States that have not yet done so to submit, at their earliest convenience, relevant information to the Secretary-General regarding the status of their domestic legislation on this matter, in accordance with paragraphs 28 and 29 of resolution 75/132.

Madam Chair,

In addition to reporting, further measures to ensure transparency and incentives for Member States to undertake the necessary legislative

amendments must be considered. In this regard, the Nordic countries would like to reiterate our previous proposal on developing a general policy on minimal requirements for States whose nationals serve as UN officials or experts on mission. A policy of this kind could draw on the Voluntary Compact on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. An essential requirement in this respect should be that all States have established relevant jurisdiction to enable the effective investigation and prosecution of potential crimes committed by their nationals, while in service for the UN abroad.

Madam Chair,

In closing, the Nordic countries would like to reiterate the importance of ensuring accountability for crimes committed while in service for the UN. As for Member States' willingness and ability to hold their own nationals accountable for crimes committed while in UN service, nothing less than full transparency is acceptable. We are ready to consider all measures that can be taken to ensure accountability and strengthen the follow-up of these cases.

Thank you.