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# UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, SIXTH COMMITTEE,  
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CRIMINAL ACCOUNTABILITY OF UNITED NATIONS OFFICIALS AND EXPERTS ON  
MISSION

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Delivered by Jonathan Hollis

*Check against delivery*

Chair, thank you for convening today's important discussion.

I would like to start by thanking the Secretary-General for his reports on the criminal accountability of United Nations officials and experts on mission and for his commitment to tackling impunity. The United Kingdom fully supports his efforts, leadership, and zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Action must be strong, visible and across the whole United Nations system.

Tackling impunity and promoting accountability, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse, remains a top priority for the United Kingdom. Our goal is to raise standards, ensure justice is fair and respond sensitively but robustly when harm or allegations of harm occur. Last month's report of the Independent Commission on the review of sexual exploitation and abuse cases and World Health Organisation staff during the tenth Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo exposed wide-scale abuse and wrongdoing. It is a timely reminder of the need for robust action to prevent and tackle such incidents and ensure accountability.

Chair,

Prevention, enforcement and remedial action – alongside a victim and survivor centred approach - set the foundations for the zero-tolerance policy. First, there must be comprehensive training and thorough vetting to prevent crimes. Second, Member States should undertake timely criminal investigations and consider strongly legislative reform, as required. And finally, we must all prioritise the rights and dignity of victims, survivors and whistleblowers.

We have come a long way in tackling these challenges, and the United Kingdom applauds the work of the United Nations Special Coordinator on

improving the United Nations' response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and the work of the Victims Rights' Advocate in ensuring the rights of victims, their experiences, and their needs are at the forefront of the United Nations fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.

But colleagues, sadly incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse continue to take place. And they continue to take place, in part, because individuals think they can act with impunity. They must know that if crimes are committed, the United Nations and its Member States will take action. Where there are widespread allegations, such as the situation currently confronting the World Health Organisation, there must be ownership: a recognition that there is a problem and that it is a pervasive one. Sexual exploitation and abuse undermines the work of all of us. The failure to hold individuals accountable, not only for perpetrating acts of sexual exploitation and abuse, but for failing to act when reports come to their attention, proliferates suffering among the people they are mandated to help and protect. It undermines the credibility and integrity of the United Nations.

We welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to implementing his strategy to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, including prioritising strong leadership across the United Nations and ensuring immunity is waived for acts by United Nations officials and experts on mission that constitute relevant crimes. However, since the responsibility for bringing perpetrators who have committed a crime to justice rests with Member States, we encourage all States to exercise their jurisdiction to ensure these crimes are investigated and, where appropriate, perpetrators prosecuted for offences. So many of us have already committed to doing this through the Voluntary Compact. We need to turn words into action. In the UK, we have implemented new domestic legislation. Our Domestic

Abuse Act (2021) extends the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the criminal courts in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to further violent and sexual offences. We encourage other Member States to take similar steps.

Colleagues, holding United Nations officials and experts on mission accountable for their actions is not only a task for the United Nations. All Member States share the responsibility and we must work together to ensure accountability across the United Nations system.

Thank you, Chair.