

# Joint Letter to Ambassadors to the UN Security Council

December 09, 2022

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield  
United States Ambassador to the United Nations  
United States Mission to the United Nations  
799 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017

## **RE: Proposed Armed Intervention in Haiti; Accountability for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**

Dear Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield:

We are writing in response to the Secretary General's call for armed [intervention](#) in Haiti, following a request from Haiti's de facto Prime Minister Ariel Henry for international assistance to address the country's ongoing humanitarian and security crisis.

We are a coalition of human rights advocates, including Haitian organizations, that work to advance women's rights and equality. Many of us have worked directly on issues related to [accountability](#) for sexual exploitation and abuse ["SEA"] perpetrated by foreign military and humanitarian actors. Though we hold varying positions on the appropriateness of an armed intervention in Haiti, we share a common concern regarding systemic failures to safeguard women and children from rape and other forms of abuse during prior interventions. We therefore call on member states to ensure that SEA is addressed through appropriate accountability mechanisms, should authorization be given for international armed intervention in Haiti.

SEA is a recurring problem in peacekeeping and security interventions. Between 2004 and 2016, the UN received nearly 2000 [reports](#) of child rape, armed sexual assault, and transactional sex involving UN peacekeepers deployed from 20 different countries, across multiple [peacekeeping](#) missions. [Allegations](#) have also been made against personnel deployed outside of UN peacekeeping operations. Incidents in both contexts are more common than reported, prosecutions are rare, and victims seldom have access to effective [legal remedies](#) or social support.

As the UN has [acknowledged](#), peacekeeping operations in Haiti rank among the highest in the world for recorded incidents of SEA. "MINUSTAH" personnel routinely engaged in exploitive relationships with Haitian women living in extreme poverty and deprivation, and coerced children into having sex in [exchange](#) for a few coins or a piece of bread. Media investigations show that hundreds of [women and girls](#) became pregnant as a result - some as young as 11 years old - and gave birth to children ultimately abandoned by peacekeepers who fathered them. These incidents often occurred against the backdrop of a deadly [cholera epidemic](#) also linked to the presence of MINUSTAH peacekeepers.

Women impregnated by peacekeepers have been rejected by their families and stigmatized within their communities for giving birth to "[petit minustah](#)" - depriving them of critical social support, and forcing many to resort to "survival sex" to meet their basic needs. Meanwhile, forums to establish paternity or to petition for child support remain out of reach for most Haitian victims of peacekeeper exploitation and abuse.

MINUSTAH contingents were also accused of committing depraved and humiliating acts of sexual violence against [children](#), often without facing meaningful consequences. A group of peacekeepers reportedly gang-raped a teenage boy while filming the assault on a cell-phone. Members of a foreign police unit allegedly raped a 13 year-old repeatedly over the course of a year, then kidnapped the boy to prevent him from speaking with investigators. More than 130 peacekeepers participated in a [child sex-ring](#) that involved children as young as 12 being passed from one peacekeeper to the next, and forced to have sex several times a day, with multiple men - including senior military officers. The UN repatriated several troops implicated in the abuse, but continued to receive personnel from the contributing country into peacekeeping [missions](#). According to media reports, none of the responsible troops were criminally [prosecuted](#).

There is a lack of clarity on what form an armed intervention in Haiti would take if it is approved, or which countries would contribute participating personnel. But the history of SEA associated with MINUSTAH demonstrates the need to center accountability in any future international deployment to Haiti, whether or not the deployment is an official UN peacekeeping mission.

This week [commemorates](#) "*16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence*." In line with that effort, we call on member states to ensure accountability for SEA by requiring that any resolution to approve armed intervention in Haiti include the following conditions:

1. An express acknowledgement that SEA falls outside the scope of UN official duties, which renders legal immunity inapplicable to related claims;
2. Implementation of an independent and accessible mechanism for receiving complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse;
3. A demonstrated commitment from contributing countries to meaningfully investigate claims of sexual exploitation and abuse, prosecute credible claims, and facilitate access to civil remedies and restitution;
4. Implementation of mechanisms to determine paternity that are easily accessible at no cost to mothers claiming that their child was fathered by foreign personnel;
5. An agreement by member states to impose and enforce parental obligations from personnel found to have fathered children, and to enforce relevant foreign judgments; and
6. Full transparency regarding funding and spending of the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocates and the "Victims Trust Fund" on matters related to SEA in Haiti, including a full financial and operational after-action audit that is publicly available.

There is no question that current conditions in Haiti are not sustainable for local populations. But an armed international response that risks repeating the harms associated with past interventions demonstrates the need for adequate safeguards to address the prevalence of, and lack of accountability for, SEA in Haiti.

Sincerely,

AIDS-Free World's Code Blue Campaign  
Ansara Family Fund  
Beyond Borders  
Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux  
Cashman Family Foundation  
Center for Constitutional Rights  
Center for Gender and Refugee Studies  
Congregation of the Mission  
Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul  
Diaspora Community Services  
Dignity Rights International  
Disaster Law Project  
Dorothy Estrada-Tanck, Professor of Law, University of Murcia, Spain  
Edmund Rice International  
Gender Action  
Global Labor Justice - International Labor Rights Forum  
Highland Park United Methodist Church  
Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti  
International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School  
International Human Rights Program (IHRP), University of Toronto Faculty of Law  
International Presentation Association  
Li Li Li Read  
Manifest Haiti  
NDSC (*Les Religieuses de Notre-Dame du Sacré Coeur*)  
Project South  
Quixote Center  
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province  
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Central-Pacific Province  
Sisters of Charity Federation  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Congregational Leadership  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Western Province Leadership  
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur  
The Episcopal Church  
Upendra Dev Acharya, Professor of Law & Director of Global Legal Education, Gonzaga University Law School