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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping

**Statement by H.E. Ms Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

Put simply, sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers must stop. It exploits the vulnerability of the very people they have been sent to protect and is a fundamental betrayal of trust. It undermines the credibility of peacekeeping operations and the legitimacy of the UN.

The Secretary-General has shown determination to pursue the UN's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. His report on Combating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse demonstrates solid progress in implementing many of the External Independent Panel's recommendations, in ensuring coherence and harmonisation through the Special Coordinator, and in operationalising Security Council resolution 2272.

We welcome the range of initiatives aimed at prevention, victim assistance and accountability. In particular, we support: commanders and managers being held responsible for creating an environment that prevents SEA; the establishment of a dedicated Trust Fund for medical, psychosocial and legal services for survivors; and the Secretariat's ongoing follow-up and reporting on the status of SEA cases.

There is still work to be done to achieve criminal accountability. Member States have the primary responsibility for investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by their nationals. We support, in principle, the proposal for an international convention which ensures the criminal accountability of UN personnel in connection with crimes committed in peacekeeping operations. It would require Member States to exercise their criminal jurisdiction over their nationals participating in UN operations. If our commitment to the rule of law is to be more than rhetoric, Member States must lead by example.

For Australia's part, our military and police personnel deployed to UN peacekeeping missions receive pre-deployment training consistent with UN DPKO requirements for SEA and other protection issues, as well as on ethics, conduct and behaviour. For the past five years, we

have included an SEA component in our bilateral exercises with Thailand and Indonesia, as well as in all major mobile training teams.

We have passed legislation which establishes Australian jurisdiction over serious crimes committed by our nationals overseas, including UN peacekeepers and UN civilians, which we have shared with the Special Coordinator.

And we maintain a stand-by investigative capability able to deploy immediately to commence investigations into alleged criminal or disciplinary offences by military and police personnel in all operations in which we participate.

Mr President, the UN has always stood as a beacon of hope for the world's most vulnerable people. Sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers extinguishes that hope for survivors and their communities. It undermines our efforts to restore peace and security and disrespects the vast majority of peacekeepers who serve honourably. We must have zero tolerance for SEA and we must provide survivors with assistance, protection and justice. They deserve nothing less.

Thank you.