

ANNOUNCEMENT ON SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE
PENTAGON PRESS BRIEFING ROOM
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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, CHUCK HAGEL

Last night I spoke with Secretary Donley about the allegations of misconduct involving the officer who had been responsible for the Air Force's sexual assault and prevention efforts. As you know, he has been removed from his position pending the outcome of this investigation. We are all outraged and disgusted over these very troubling allegations.

Sexual assault is a despicable crime, and one of the most serious challenges facing this Department. It is a threat to the safety and welfare of our people, and the health, reputation, and trust of this institution. That reality is underscored by the annual report on sexual assault in the military being released today.

This Department may be nearing a stage where the frequency of this crime – and the perception that there is tolerance of it – could very well undermine our ability to effectively carry out the mission, and to recruit and retain the good people we need. That is unacceptable to me, and it should be unacceptable to everyone associated with the United States military.

We need cultural change where every service member is treated with dignity and respect; where all allegations of inappropriate behavior are treated with seriousness; where victim's privacy is protected; where bystanders are motivated to intervene; and where offenders know they will be held accountable by a strong and effective system of justice. All our leaders, at every level, will be held accountable for preventing and responding to sexual assault in the ranks.

The Department is putting in place important new programs to achieve this level of accountability. Last month, I announced a set of measures to reform the military justice system. This includes proposed changes to Article 60 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) that would eliminate the ability of a convening authority to change findings in courts-martial, except for certain minor offenses. These changes would also require the convening authority to explain in writing any changes made to court-martial sentences, as well as any changes to findings involving minor offenses.

Today I am announcing a new series of actions to further DoD's sexual assault and prevention efforts.

I am directing the military services to align their programs with a revised *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Strategic Plan*. By clearly defining priorities, objectives, and tasks, this plan – and its effective implementation – will help ensure that the DoD's ongoing initiatives to reduce and ultimately eliminate sexual assault are being closely tracked and achieving their purpose.

In addition, I am directing implementation of measures specifically addressing accountability, command climate, and victim advocacy.

These new actions are as follows:

- I am directing the Service Chiefs to develop methods to hold military commanders accountable for establishing command climates of dignity and respect, and incorporating sexual assault prevention and victim care principles in their commands.
- I am directing the Service Secretaries to implement methods to improve victim treatment by their peers, co-workers, and chains of command. Direct victim input will be incorporated into these methods.
- I am directing that all commanders be provided the results of their subordinates' annual command climate surveys in order to enhance accountability and improve insight into command climate at every level of the chain of command.
- I am directing the Department to improve the effectiveness of sexual assault prevention and response programs in recruiting organizations to ensure the awareness and safety of new and aspiring service members.
- I am directing DoD component heads to direct comprehensive and regular visual inspections of all DoD workplaces, to include military academies, to ensure that our facilities promote an environment of dignity and respect and are free from materials that create a degrading or offensive work environment. This will be complete by July 1st.

To enhance the administration of military justice, I am also directing the DoD Acting General Counsel to develop a method to incorporate the rights afforded to victims through the Crime Victims' Rights Act into military justice practice. The General Counsel will also evaluate the Air Force Special Victims Counsel pilot program and other approaches to ensure that victims of sexual assault are provided the advice and counsel they need to understand their rights and to feel confident in the military justice system.

Last week, I named a set of highly respected and experienced experts to serve on a panel called for in the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2013. The panel will conduct an independent review and assessment of DoD's systems used to investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate crimes involving adult sexual assault and related offenses. It will convene its first meeting no later than July 1st, and I will ask the panel to accelerate its work and provide final recommendations within 12 months.

Together, everyone in this Department – at every level of command – will continue to work together every day to establish an environment of dignity and respect, where sexual assault is not tolerated, condoned, or ignored. Where there is clear accountability placed on all leaders at every level. The leadership of the Department has no higher priority than the safety and welfare of our men and women in uniform, and that includes ensuring they are free from the threat of sexual harassment and sexual assault. I will continue to prioritize the Department's efforts to turn this problem around.

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