

**Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Jonathan Greenert  
SASC Opening Statement on Sexual Assault**

**June 4, 2013**

Chairman Levin, ranking member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about addressing this deeply troubling issue. I'm grateful for your involvement and for your continued interest in providing our commanders and Sailors the tools to help stamp out the crime of sexual assault from within our ranks.

Sexual assault is a serious offense. It is contrary to everything that we stand for; and it is not who we are.

For me, this represents a significant safety issue and is an existential threat to our core values. It's a defining challenge for our time. Our Sailors deserve a safe environment in which to serve their nation. I am outraged and I find it inconceivable that a shipmate would assault another shipmate – someone with whom they stand watch, entrust their lives at sea and with whom they will go into combat.

However, my outrage alone is not enough. We need thoughtful, deliberate, relentless and effective action. We need to dig into the root causes and establish and put in place sustained improvements that can be institutionalized and assessed over the long term. At a minimum our current and future readiness are at stake.

Three years ago we began a sustained effort to improve our prevention and response programs. One outcome was development and integration of a pilot program that we instituted at our training command in Great Lakes, Illinois. We chose an environment that we felt we could more readily control – a school environment. The results over two years have been: sustained and substantial reduction in the prevalence of sexual assaults and conduct violations. Based on these positive results, we have instituted similar programs at the Aviation Training Command at Pensacola, the Naval Academy and Naval Station, San Diego; where we will be implementing these programs in Naples, Italy; and Yokosuka, Japan within the next 6 months. Initial feedback from Sailors thus far has generally been positive: again, reduction in conduct violations and sexual assault reports and more confidence in their security environment. The foundation of these pilots has been focused and engaged leadership at every echelon of the command.

And these are a snapshot of initiatives to improve command climates, to weed out perpetrators and to create an environment that dissuades these crimes from occurring. We have much more work to do in this area.

Our Sailors must be confident in our reporting process. Sailors inform us that simple, multiple, reliable and readily available means of discretely reporting a sexual assault imbues confidence in the reporting process for sexual assault. All our Sailors need to know how to do this. In April we completed training for every Sailor in the navy; we reinforced that there are multiple options available, in every unit, to report an assault. For example: Sailors can report a sexual assault to victim advocates, a sexual assault response coordinator, the DoD safeline by web or phone, medical personnel, the chain of command, judge advocates, 9-1-1 or the base

police, a NCIS agent or the chaplain. We are hiring additional professional, credentialed, response coordinators and victim advocates to augment the existing 3,500 trained, active duty advocates that we have today.

In addition to numerous efforts in prevention and victim support, we recognize our military justice system and processes may need to evolve. Previous challenges, such as drug abuse in the 70s and early 80s, demonstrated that the uniform code of military justice must be able to adapt to better serve our Sailors and to provide adequate support for our commanders. Accordingly, as with the department's article 60 proposal, we must ensure that our proposed modifications to the military justice system are deliberate, they consider second order effects, and do not ultimately adversely impact the best interests of justice, victim's rights, and due process rights of the accused. Further, the unit commander's authority and role, as the singular individual accountable for the welfare of his or her Sailors, should be preserved –such that the commander is able to carry out his or her mission.

I believe that for complex and comprehensive changes, those that propose structural changes to the military justice system and UCMJ, particularly the role of the commander, the response systems panel created by section 576 should be given the opportunity to complete an independent assessment.

It is clear that preventing and responding to sexual assault is not just a legal issue – it is assuredly a leadership issue –and fundamentally imbedded in what we call “the charge of command”. The commanding officer is responsible and accountable for everything that happens in his or her ship, squadron, or unit. We expect our commanders to create a safe working environment, founded on dignity and respect; one that reinforces our core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

To reinforce this concept each sexual assault report is briefed by the unit commander to the first flag in the chain of command, focusing on root causes, location, environment and means for future avoidance. I review the collation of these results, quarterly, with my navy four star commanders, focusing on trends, progress and a framework for further action.

We have found that successful, effective and permanent changes in our military are best done through our commanders –the chain of command. I believe this is true for the military justice process as well. From initial disposition, through convening authority, to post trial review, the chain of command should be involved. Recently, in the interest of improving the military justice process, in the cases of the commission of, or the attempt to commit, rape, sexual assault, or forcible sodomy the department elevated the disposition authority to the O-6 level to enhance seniority, experience, and objectivity in this important element of the military justice process.

Navy commanders are often required to make independent decisions, far from shore, in uncertain or hazardous conditions. Given the unique nature of their responsibility, and the authority and accountability we bestow on them for the welfare of their crew and mission accomplishment, I believe it is essential that our commanders be involved in each phase of the military justice process.

Mr. Chairman, we know there is more to do. We remain committed to preventing these crimes, to weeding out perpetrators, and to providing compassionate and coordinated support for sexual assault victims, to holding commanders accountable, and to ensuring that sexual assault cases are processed through a fair, effective, and efficient military justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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