

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Sexual Assault Prevention Summit
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Two weeks ago, I went to Japan and Korea. I got the opportunity to talk to about 7,000 Sailors and Marines. The ones in Japan had been in Operation Tomodachi. The ones in Korea stand watch every day. And just talking to them, watching what they have done, getting briefed on Operation Tomodachi, on the things that they do every day, showed how they are the most important thing that the Navy and Marine Corps bring to what we do. The force that we have allows us to meet and succeed in every single mission that the president, secretary of defense and the nation gives us.

What we ask of the force and their families, day in, day out, is simply incredible. Their duty takes them a long way from home a lot of times. They are gone for a long time, more often than not. And a lot of the things they do every day are hard and dangerous. That every single Sailor and Marine takes up this burden willingly and without complaint ought to be an inspiration to everybody.

And as they do this, as they perform their jobs, we as leaders of the Navy and Marine Corps owe them some things. We owe them the tools they need to get their job done. We owe them constant, steadfast leadership. And we owe them a day-to-day safe and secure working environment, free from harassment and free from assault.

But some of our Sailors and Marines aren't getting that. Like a lot of you, every day I read the operational reports from the fleet. And every day, it seems like there's a new report of sexual assault on some of our folks. And this is not just a perception – there's hard data to back it up. In both of the last two years, there has been an average of over 900 sexual assaults a year – 900. That's almost three times every, single day. Three times a day, somebody in our force gets assaulted. Three times a day, somebody that wears the uniform of this country and has sworn to defend it and protect it is being assaulted. Three times a day.

If somebody was being shot at three times a day, we would do something about it. If there were other forms of attacks taking place on our force almost three times a day, we would fix it. This ought to make us mad. It ought to really anger us. And that many assaults are blue-on-blue ought to make us even more mad yet and engender within every responsible leader a commitment to eliminate sexual assault in the Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy and Marine Corps are a family. Families should not, do not hurt their own.

I've said it before. Sexual assault is not only a reprehensible act, it's a criminal act. Sexual predators are nothing more than criminals. These assaults create lasting physical and lasting emotional trauma to the survivors that last long after the attack has occurred. They're corrosive to our morale and to our readiness and to our combat ability. And the fallout from these sexual assaults negatively impacts the public perception of the military that we have built

painstakingly over the years, and it affects our relationship with local communities, both inside the country and overseas. There is no place – none – in the Navy and Marine Corps for sexual assaults or for those who do them.

Because of this, almost two years ago I created the DON Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office – SAPRO – and I made it part of my secretarial staff. I wanted to keep the issue at the front of the discussion; make sure that we had easy communication between SAPRO and NCIS and JAG; make sure that I got constant updates about what was happening, about the incidents of sexual assault and what progress or lack of progress that we were making. I also wanted to focus attention not just on response but on prevention, but making sure that if prevention failed, that we responded well and supported the victims adequately.

And since its creation, headed by Jill Loftus, DON-SAPRO has been incredibly busy, traveling to scores of installations. At every base, they talk to commanders about the programs they've got going and they evaluate some of the lessons learned and successes from around the Navy and the Marine Corps because in order to fix the problem, you've first got to understand how big a problem you've got. It's the only way we'll know if the programs are working; it's the only way we'll know if what we're doing is making a difference – if we're getting any better at it.

In order to get a better picture of what's really happening and the effectiveness of some of these prevention programs and response programs, SAPRO is going to be conducting another departmental-wide, anonymous survey this summer. And I know that at this summit, you've heard from some distinguished experts on things we can do, how we can measure it, programs we can put in place, actions that we can take. One of the things that we've done to help with this data collection and to make sure that we are analyzing this data together, SAPRO has partnered with NCIS and we've created a full-time position inside NCIS solely to examine sexual assault data and sexual assault trends.

But the disturbing thing is that the central finding of their work is that the reported sexual assaults have not changed over the past few years. Now, what we don't know for sure is whether the number is remaining the same or whether because barriers are being knocked down to reporting, that people are simply reporting sexual assaults more. Either way, on an absolute scale, we're still looking at the same number of sexual assaults. That's disturbing.

Another disturbing trend is that reports are coming in later. Few reports are filed in the first few days after an assault and fewer reports are filed in the first 30 days. And this creates problems because as time passes, evidence degrades, evidence is lost. It's a lot more difficult to do an accurate investigation and it's a lot harder to hold offenders responsible with every day that passes between attack and report and investigation.

So to combat some of these things, as you've learned about, SAPRO is going to continue to expand the Bystander Intervention Program. So far, this program has trained 25 units – over 5300 Sailors and Marines – on recognizing and intervening in risky situations, on recognizing and intervening during crisis. This is the sort of training – it's focused training – that's needed to ensure that every Sailor and Marine understands the basic message that sexual assaults are not

okay, they're not acceptable and they're not going to be tolerated and that everybody has got to protect everybody else – that we've got to look after our shipmates – and that alcohol is not the only way to have a good time on liberty.

Almost every case of assault involves alcohol use by the victim, by the offender or by both. It's fuel to the fire. If we can successfully deglamorize alcohol, reduce its abuse, we're going to go a ways toward reducing assaults.

Over the next year, the Bystander Intervention Program is going to be expanded to include video-based training for our junior Marines, on-site training at Great Lakes, on-site training at recruit commands and at training at every single A-school. We'll be reaching a huge number of our junior people, who we've found, through these surveys, are most at risk of being assaulted.

If prevention fails, we have to be ready to respond and to hold offenders accountable. NCIS and the services have partnered to review closed cases, analyze the patterns of historic assaults and develop best practices in investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases. By doing this, we hope to improve the quality of future investigations and prosecution of sexual assault cases.

In addition, NCIS and SAPRO have sponsored the Sexual Assault Investigation and Prosecution mobile training teams to train agents and prosecutors on sexual assault response and on investigation. So far, 50 agents and 78 prosecutors for both services have received the training and more is scheduled in the near future.

And then within the next year, SAPRO and the office of the judge advocate will also hold a victim-attorney conference to make sure that we have good communication between sexual assault experts and our JAGs, with the goal of improving the judge advocate's role in supporting the unique needs of sexual assault victims.

Prevention, intervention, help-seeking behavior: Those are the three things we have got to stress. We've got to improve our prevention efforts. We've got to make sure that people know they should and need to intervene. And we've got to strongly support our survivors and strengthen post-assault investigation and prosecution. By doing this, the legal community and SAPRO office is taking strong steps to move in the right direction, educate folks and reduce the number of assaults.

Now, as leaders in the services, we have to support these efforts in every way and at every opportunity, and the message has to be the same. And it doesn't matter what level of command you're at – you've got to have the same message. I'm going to continue to hold our COs responsible for their command sexual assault and prevention programs, demand that they properly train their personnel and hold them accountable if that doesn't occur.

But we've got to have the same accountability from every leader, particularly our first-line leaders – the ones our junior Sailors and Marines really listen to. It's these leaders who will influence the success or failure of our programs. It's the chiefs and the gunnys on the deckplates

who know their Sailors, know their Marines, see them every day, help shape their conduct, know when something isn't right and will really make a difference.

But it's up to everyone else. This is just wrong. There is no other way to put it. It's wrong. It should not exist in our service. We should not allow it to exist. To allow members of our force to be attacked an average of three times a day, every day of the year is just wrong. This cannot continue. If we're going to maintain the fighting force that we have, if we're going to maintain the leadership role that we have, if we're going to maintain the reputation we have built over the years for discipline, for integrity, for protecting our own, this cannot continue. It's got to get better and it is not getting better.

This ought to make us mad. And this ought to lead us to do something about it; to take it seriously and not just at these conferences, as important as they are, but every day, day in, day out, not let a single thing slide, make sure that people intervene, that they know it's part of protecting their shipmates, know that they have to, not only they ought to; they've got a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable.

I am absolutely confident that if we do take this seriously, that if we do the things that DON-SAPRO, that the experts have been talking about here, we can and we will break the back of this crime. Together, we'll live up to what the Navy and Marine Corps represent, that the people in this room and the people around the fleet will eliminate sexual assault.

It is just wrong. We have a responsibility to do something about it. Three times a day – three times a day. We cannot allow this to continue. If we are to remain the greatest expeditionary fighting force the world has ever known, we cannot allow this to continue. If we are going to protect our shipmates, we cannot allow this to continue. If we are going to remain the Navy and Marine Corps that people look up to and should look up to, this cannot continue.

Go make this work. Protect our shipmates. End this scourge. Thank you for your service; thank you for coming; have a great rest of your summit.