



SWANalert

Service Women's Action Network Reacts to Pentagon Report on Sexual Assault Trends at Military Academies *Demands Pentagon Back-Up Today's Report with Immediate Action to Change "Institutionalized Culture of Sexual Assault and Harassment"*

NEW YORK, NY – On Wednesday, the Department of Defense's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) issued their "Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the U.S. Military Service Academies" which revealed a 64% increase in sexual assault reports from the previous year, and found that over 90% of assaults go unreported. The report also indicated nearly 80% of sexual harassment incidents go unreported by both men and women because cadets feel it is "not important."

Responding to the release of the report, the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) - a national human rights organization founded and led by women veterans – called on the Pentagon to immediately undergo a process of reviewing and updating policy measures to combat a pervasive culture of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment (defined by the Dept. of Defense as Military Sexual Trauma, or MST) currently found within the military service academies.

"The military is a top-down organization and positive cultural change must begin with accountability from the highest levels of military leadership," said Anuradha Bhagwati, a former Marine Corps Captain and Executive Director of SWAN. "The vast majority of generals and admirals began their careers as cadets and midshipmen at the military academies. They have been steeped in leadership models and ethical traditions that clearly fail when it comes to issues of Military Sexual Trauma."

The report released today has been published annually since 2006 and provides data on reported sexual assaults involving cadets and midshipmen, as well as policies, procedures and

processes implemented in response to sexual harassment and violence during the previous academic year. The full report is available at: <http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports>.

"The reality today is that military academies are insular environments where sexual predators face little risk of prosecution, and survivors have little hope for institutional protections," continued Bhagwati. "The academies integrated in 1976 and it took 30 years before a West Point cadet was convicted on a rape charge. Although cadets are finally being prosecuted for sexual offenses, the punishment rarely fits the crime. To change the current culture of impunity, we must hold military leaders accountable by demanding that they support survivors and relentlessly prosecute sexual predators."

The report lists in detail sexual offenses at each academy and the final dispositions of the cases brought for discipline. Of the 41 reports, only 17 were referred to commanders for action: 4 cases were recommended for courts-martial, 3 individuals received Non-Judicial Punishment (administrative discipline), and the remaining 7 received in-school discipline which consisted of additional duties, suspension of privileges, or class demerits.

"The longest sentence that the military handed out in these academy rape cases was only 3-1/2 years in prison," said Bhagwati. "The fact that an individual can plead guilty to raping a fellow cadet and receive punishments like demerits or additional duty instead of jail time is unconscionable."

In New York State, forcible rape is a class B felony, punishable by 12-1/2 to 25 years in prison.

"This issue has far reaching consequences, and not just for those in the military. Rapists are routinely discharged from the military as a form of punishment, often times with nothing in their records that reflects their criminal activity while serving." Bhagwati said. "In these cases the military is unleashing sexual predators into unsuspecting civilian communities where statistics show they are likely to rape again."

On Monday, SWAN and the ACLU filed a lawsuit in U.S. Federal District Court in New Haven, CT against the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration (VA) to obtain the release of records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) on the prevalence of MST within the armed services, the policies of the DOD and VA regarding MST and other related disabilities, and the nature of each agency's response to MST. To read the press release announcing the filing of this lawsuit, please go to:

[http://www.servicewomen.org/userfiles/File/SWAN%20alert%20FOIA\(2\).pdf](http://www.servicewomen.org/userfiles/File/SWAN%20alert%20FOIA(2).pdf).

To read the lawsuit complaint, please go to:

<http://www.servicewomen.org/userfiles/File/2010-12-13-MSTFOIAComplaint.pdf>.

SWAN is a national human rights organization founded and led by women veterans. SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also

seeks to reform veterans' services on a national scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families. You can follow Service Women's Action Network on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/servicewomen>, or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/servicewomen>.

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