

## 25% increase in sex assault in combat zones: 'Wait until she's sober,' says Pentagon watchdog

BY RICHARD SISK  
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The Pentagon is launching a sex assault prevention campaign which advises soldiers to "ask her when she's sober."

WASHINGTON - It didn't get the attention of President Obama's recent Special Olympics gaffe, but a "wait until she's sober" crack by the military's top sex crimes watchdog was more offensive, one New York lawmaker says.

"This woman is not in the right line of work," Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-Rochester) said of the statement last week by Dr. Kaye Whitley, director of the Pentagon's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.

Whitley's bizarre quote came as she released the military's annual report on sex assault, which showed a 25% increase in combat zones, including 22 cases in Afghanistan and 143 in Iraq.

In pitching "bystander intervention" to curb attacks and harassment, Whitley gave this example: "If you see one of your buddies serve drinks to somebody to get them drunk, maybe what you do is step in and say 'Why don't you wait until she's sober?'"

Slaughter was aghast. "I was really shocked anyone would say a thing like that," she said.

In effect, Whitley was telling the troops to "go after her when she's sober - that says she's fair game," added Slaughter, who sponsored the legislation that required the military to report annually on sex assaults and its efforts to curb them.

In a written response to The News, Whitley said Slaughter did not "hear the statement in the context of the overall prevention strategy of the Department."

The statement came from a poster in a military marketing campaign called "Our Strength is for Defending" that is aimed at prevention, Whitley said.

The poster reads: "My Strength is for Defending, so when I saw that she was drunk, I told him, 'Ask her when she's sober.' Preventing sexual assault is part of my duty."

Whitley's annual report showed that the number of sex assaults in the 1.4 million-member active-duty military increased 8% to 2,908 in the year ending in September 2008.

Whitley noted that only about 20% of the attacks are reported because of "the fear and stigma associated with the crime."

Just 38% of the cases that were reported eventually were referred to a court martial, she said.

"This is one of the problems," said Rachel Natelson, a lawyer at the Veterans and Servicemembers Project of the Urban Justice Center in Manhattan. "It's a lack of consequences. People think they can act with impunity."