

UTair Disciplines Worker for Sex Abuse in Congo

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UNITED NATIONS — UTair, a Russian airline used by UN missions around the world, has disciplined an employee found guilty of sexual abuse in the Congo and said it was taking steps to prevent any future misconduct.

Last week, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations said it temporarily suspended the contracts of two Russian air transportation firms active in Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and elsewhere after several staff sexually abused local residents. The companies involved were UTair Aviation and Nefteyugansk United Airline, which provide airplane and helicopter services for UN missions around the world.

"It is true that in May 2011 actions of an employee ... in Congo were classified by the UN as sexual abuse," UTair said Friday in a statement. "UTair is fully sharing the 'zero tolerance policy' regarding such actions, as declared by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.☒

"Therefore it actively participated in investigation of this case by the special UN committee and took the required disciplinary measures toward its employee," it said.

✘The airline did not offer details of the disciplinary measures taken against the employee who committed the abuse. ✘

UN officials have declined to provide details on the sexual misconduct of the employees involved in the case, though one source familiar with the decision said the sexual abuse was "extremely serious." ✘

"UTair is confident that implementing new practices and continuous monitoring of the situation will allow it to fully comply with [UN] requirements ... and conform to the high status of a UN vendor," UTair said. ✘Nefteyugansk has not issued any statement. E-mails sent to its press office were returned with a message that its mailboxes were full. ✘

UTair says it is the biggest air services vendor supplying the United Nations, with more than 50 helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft engaged for UN missions in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sudan, Congo and Afghanistan. ✘

It was not immediately clear what, if any, follow-up actions the Russian government would take against those guilty of misconduct. A spokesman for Russia's UN mission did not respond to repeated requests for comment. The Congolese ambassador has said he was looking into the matter.

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