

SHARP opens third phase of I. A.M. Strong campaign

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By [Rob McIlvaine, ARNEWS](#)

ARLINGTON, Va. (Army News Service, March 28, 2011) -- The fourth annual Sexual Harassment/Assault Response & Prevention summit opened phase three of I. A.M. Strong's four-phase assault to eliminate sexual violence in the Army, March 28.

Entitled "Achieving Cultural Change," this phase will encourage leaders of all ranks - military and civilian - to set the conditions for an Army culture that's free of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

"All of you are dedicated to eliminating this threat," said Secretary of the Army John McHugh. "And it's a threat to our cohesion of our units, a threat to our units and a threat to our very humanity."

"The fact that this sexual assault still occurs in our ranks is heartbreaking and it's antithetical to everything we value in this institution," he said.

Clifford L. Stanley, under secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, brought his experience to the conference as the senior policy adviser to the Secretary of Defense on recruitment, career development, pay and benefits for 1.4 million active-duty military personnel, 1.3 million Guard and Reserve personnel, and 689,000 DoD civilians. He is also responsible for overseeing the overall state of military readiness.

"The foundation of who we are as a people is love," Stanley said.

"When you love, sexual assault and harassment simply don't happen. How could they if you really care about this person you're working with, how could they if you really care about yourself, how could they if you even cared about what other people thought about you."

"As professionals we have an obligation to take care of our people," Stanley said.

In 2008, then Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and Army Chief of Staff George W. Casey Jr. launched a new prevention strategy, including the I. A.M. (Intervene, Act, Motivate) Strong Campaign to prevent sexual assault and harassment.

The five-year, four-phased campaign goal is to change Army culture and to share best practices.

"We want to be the best in the nation at preventing this crime and then we want to share that with all

communities both nationally and internationally," said Carolyn Collins, SHARP Program Office division chief.

"We launched phase one in September 2008, committed Army leadership, and got them to understand the problem and look at the command culture area.

"Phase two was Army-wide conviction, basically every Soldier fighting the fight to stop sexual harassment, sexual assault, and this was a builder skill set; give them the training and awareness" she said.

Lynn Rosenthal, advisor to the White House's Commitment to Combating Violence Against Women, is an advocate who has devoted 30 years to improving the lives of women and their children.

"What you're doing here today will set a tone for our nation. I cannot imagine any other institution that could set that tone in a way the U.S. Army can."

Prior to directing the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Rosenthal said she had read then-Sen. Joe Biden's 1991 report, "A week in the life of American Women." This report detailed acts of rape and harassment that women had experienced in big cities and small towns all across this country in just one week.

Over the next two years, Biden held hearings, where for the first time in the U.S. Senate, these stories were told, and resulted in his Violence Against Women Act being signed into law on Sept. 13, 1994.

"But in spite of all of the work in the past 16 and a half years, sexual assault remains the most violent, under-reported crime in the country," Rosenthal said.

This week, phase three will build on the first two phases, said Collins, and begin partnering, not only within Army communities, but also outside garrison gates where the Army is involved with close to 1,300 high schools and about 274 colleges.

"What we know in our research is that about a third of the individuals assaulted in the last year are reporting the crime. But we want all of our Soldiers to come forward to report the crime. So we're trying to build that culture where people feel comfortable coming forth and reporting," Collins said.

Sgt. 1st Class Meshone Rover from Fort Shafter, Hawaii, is the deployable sexual assault coordinator for Unit Victim Advocacy where she goes out on sexual assault calls in Hawaii, Japan and Alaska.

"Now that the SHARP program has begun, we make ourselves accessible to victims and have made reporting procedures safer," Rover said.

Four years ago, she said, only about three victims reported a sexual assault in her area because they

didn't trust the command to keep it private. But last year, 45 victims reported an assault.

Carolyn Collins's research shows the numbers went down eight percent last year.

"We had 1,795 in 2009 and 1,689 in 2010. We know our actual numbers went down, not just our reported numbers. And our rate per 1,000 went down. We grew our Army the last few years, but our rate per 1,000 didn't go up with that, it actually came down, so we believe we are reducing crime," Collins said.

She attributes this to encouraging reporting, providing some of the best care in the nation, and the Army dedicating itself to prosecution and investigation techniques.

Following this conference, Rover said she'll go back home and continue the fight.

"I'm going to make sure senior noncommissioned officers are more aware of this and I will motivate Soldiers to report any harassment or assault," Rover said.

One of the programs her team conducts is "shock factor."

"I bring in music that exploits women by using sexually offensive language in order to show how sex harassment can lead to sexual assault," Rover said.

The five-day summit will present the opportunity to Army senior leaders, program managers and coordinators to partner with national DoD leaders, receive strategic guidance, learn from subject matter experts and share best practices.

"Through the collective strengths these Soldiers and civilians bring to bear on this issue, especially during this week's working groups, we will be able to use their ideas to further refine the "I. A.M. Strong" campaign from unit level to the Army staff and effectively influence the culture," Collins said.

Phase four, scheduled for 2013, has the theme of sustain, refine and share best practices.

"We will assess ourselves by making sure we are doing the best we can, and we will adjust fire, just as in the Army, to make sure our investment is bringing about change so we can achieve our goal of eliminating sexual harassment and assault," Collins said.