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NDP wants military to probe Afghan abuse policy

Troops told to stay out of 'purely local matter'

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RICK WESTHEAD
STAFF REPORTER

The federal NDP defence critic says she will ask the Military Police Complaints Commission to investigate allegations by military chaplains and mental-health workers that Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have been ordered to turn a blind eye to sexual abuse they witness against civilians.

Dawn Black (New Westminster-Coquitlam) said in an interview "there needs to be a thorough investigation. These are absolutely horrific (new) allegations. We're supposed to be there protecting human rights."

The *Star* reported yesterday that several military chaplains have counselled soldiers for post-traumatic stress disorder since their return from Afghanistan and one of the causes has been allegations that their rules of engagement prevented them from stopping Afghan soldiers from abusing young boys.

"We should be the standard-bearer of ethics and morality," said Lt. Joe Johns, a chaplain based in Petawawa, Ont., who has counselled Afghan veterans. "Putting these soldiers in situations where they are helpless to intervene is the surest way to break them."

One Canadian military police officer emailed the *Star* late yesterday to detail training some soldiers get before deploying to Kandahar.

"Prior to our departure from Canada, all troops, at least on my rotation, received lectures and training on Afghan culture," wrote the officer. "It was a well-known fact that we could expect to see or learn about instances in which men would sexually assault young boys ... we were told that it was not uncommon and ... actually considered normal behaviour there ...

"Afghan military units could be expected to have young boys with them or they would find young boys when they camped for the night and that besides getting tea these young boys were expected to do chores such as laundry, cleaning and to be available sexually for the soldiers," the officer wrote.

"We were not to get involved in this purely local and domestic matter ... "

A defence department spokesperson declined to comment. The commission is already investigating allegations that the Canadian military police transferred detainees to Afghan authorities despite evidence they could be tortured.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay told the House of Commons yesterday he had spoken with military leaders to ensure "all Canadian soldiers report any allegation of unlawful acts that they might see."