

# New safety training brought in after sexual assault on Canadian at NATO base in Latvia

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General Wayne Donald Eyre (C), Canadian chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) talks with soldiers during a visit of the Adazi military base, north east of Riga, Latvia, on March 8, 2022. Photo by TOMS NORDE /AFP via Getty Images

Civilian workers supporting Canadian troops in Latvia are being given new safety training in the aftermath of a sexual assault on one of their colleagues by a NATO soldier.

The use of a buddy system for workers who are walking around the NATO base after dark is also being emphasized after Canadian military police were told of other attacks on women at the installation near Riga.

This newspaper revealed Oct. 5 that a Canadian civilian worker had been sexually assaulted by a NATO soldier at Camp Adazi in December 2022.

But Kristen Adams was told by management of Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) that she should have realized she could have faced such an incident when she signed on for the job of supporting Canadian soldiers in Latvia.

Adams has been seeking answers from the military's senior leadership, including Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Wayne Eyre, about the attack while she worked in a canteen operated by Canada for its troops in Latvia. Canadian military police reports and documents noted Adams was sexually assaulted when an Albanian soldier grabbed her breast on Dec. 3, 2022.

National Defence spokesperson Jessica Lamirande said training for staff of the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services was being changed. "Pre-deployment training for CFMWS personnel has been revamped in order to include extensive information on harassment and violence prevention," Lamirande confirmed.

CFMWS implemented the new measures for its pre-deployment training on Sept. 15, National Defence said.

This newspaper had submitted questions about the attack on Adams on Sept. 14.

Adams told Canadian military police about two other sexual assaults at Camp Adazi, according to a military police report dated March 23, 2023. During her interview with police, Adams noted those women did not report the attacks "as they believed nothing would be done and were scared to be sent home," the Canadian report added.

In response to a request for data on sexual assaults at Camp Adazi, Lamirande said, "It is not possible to get an accurate picture of the number of sexual assault complaints due to the multi-national makeup of the battle group in Latvia."

Sexual offences under Canadian military police jurisdiction that occur on deployed operations are included in the overall total numbers of sexual assaults in the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal annual report, she added.

Larmirande also noted that a camera installed in the canteen where Adams worked would be repositioned to ensure video coverage of the entire facility.

In addition, there will be training on "systems of oppression and culture risk factors in regions deployed to in terms of how they relate to sexual harassment and violence," Lamirande added.

Adams, a contract worker, said the new measures were too little too late. She said Canadian women working in the canteen were often alone, particularly during early-morning opening hours.

Adams believes the Canadian military and CFMWS are trying to sweep

the incident under the rug. "They don't want anything to cause embarrassment for the Latvia mission," she said.

In addition, the changes being brought in are still trying to explain the sexual assault in terms of cultural differences between NATO soldiers, Adams said. "Sexual assault is wrong, no matter what culture you come from."

Adams originally reported the attack to Canadian military police at Camp Adazi shortly after it happened. But police told Adams that, under NATO rules, they had no jurisdiction to investigate even though the incident took place at a Canadian facility.

Latvian military police were brought in to investigate and concluded there was "no discernible wrongdoing that could be properly classified and interpreted as sexual harassment."

Canadian military police, meanwhile, referred to Adams as a victim of a sexual assault in various reports.

National Defence noted in a statement to this newspaper that Adams had received support from CFMWS and had been referred to the Canadian Armed Forces' Sexual Misconduct Response Centre for additional support.

*David Pugliese is an award-winning journalist covering Canadian Forces and military issues in Canada. To support his work, including exclusive content for subscribers only, sign up here: [ottawacitizen.com/subscribe](https://ottawacitizen.com/subscribe)*

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