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WASHINGTON (April 21, 2014) -- Across the United States, April is recognized as National Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Month. The Department of Defense is committed to moving toward a culture free of sexual assault and encourages all members of the military and civilians within the Department to follow the theme: "Live Our Values: Step Up To Stop Sexual Assault."

President Barack Obama, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and top DOD leadership continue to keep sexual assault prevention and awareness issue on the forefront of the nation's and DOD's agenda, while leadership actively works to tackle the issue.

In a speech earlier this month at Fort Belvoir, Va., Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Snow, director of the DOD's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, assured those in the audience that, with the full backing of Secretary of Defense Hagel, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department is "attacking sexual assault from all sides."

"After three months on the job, I clearly can't stand up here and tell you I have all the answers. Still, there are a couple things I can say with certainty," said Snow. "We recognize we are dealing with a highly complex crime and a multifaceted societal problem, and it will take all of us to eliminate sexual assault from our ranks. Our commitment to eradicating sexual assault and protecting our men and women who serve is genuine and sincere. And, we need everyone at every level to make a personal commitment to stop sexual assault."

Snow went on to say that personal commitment should include intervening in situations that pose a risk for sexual harassment and assault, and empowering survivors of sexual assault to come forward, knowing that when they do, they will be treated with respect.

Over the past year, Hagel has undertaken a wide range of policy initiatives to address the problem of sexual assault in the military, including expanding victim rights, improving victim legal support, and enhancing commander accountability. Snow, working in lock-step with Hagel, echoed his sentiments and also emphasized that sexual assault will not be eliminated through policy alone.

"We all have a critical role in preventing and responding to sexual assault," he said. "When I say or read those words I think about social courage, which is critical to eradicating sexual assault from our ranks. Social courage is having the guts to safely step up and stop it -- or seek help -- when you see inappropriate or illegal behavior. Social courage is showing empathy and support for those being wrongfully mistreated. In the words of Winston Churchill, 'Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.' This is what we want each of you to do: step up; be counted; intervene; act; listen; and support."

In his Presidential Proclamation on National Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Month, Obama also emphasized that eradicating sexual assault from communities across America is a shared responsibility.

"This month, let us recognize that we all have a stake in preventing sexual assault, and we all have the power to make a difference. Together, let us stand for dignity and respect, strengthen the fabric of our communities, and build a safer, more just world," he said.

If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, please visit the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office website for resources and victim assistance. You can also find sexual assault prevention and response resources in your local community by visiting the National Resource Directory's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response folder.