STATEMENT BY THE SERVICE WOMEN’S ACTION NETWORK ON MARINES UNITED AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF NUDE PHOTOS

[Washington, DC – March 7, 2017] – The Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN) is deeply concerned and discouraged by the recent news that service women have been the target of stalking, harassment and bullying by current and former members of the Marine Corps. Although we are concerned, we are not surprised.

This is the third prominent incident since 2013 involving significant online targeting of actively serving women Marines by male Marines. Marine Corps leadership has thus far appeared to be unable or unwilling to stop this behavior. The formula of tepid responses by Marine senior leaders and light or no punishment for perpetrators is clearly not adequate to stop this behavior.

Marginalization damages service women in ways that matter even after they leave the service. Women in the military are more than twice as likely than military men to suffer from stress injury and depression, and the suicide rates of service women are six times higher than civilian women. This is an ongoing problem in the military but most specifically in the USMC, which has the highest level of harassment and assault rates among the Services. A 2015 Rand report found that for service women, the Marine Corps had the highest rate of sexual assault risk.

This behavior has its origin at Marine Corps boot camp. The Marine Corps is the only service that segregates men and women at basic training. Women Marines are physically separated from men and held to different and lower training standards. This creates and perpetuates an us versus them environment where women are viewed as a lesser category of Marine and ultimately results in high levels of harassment and assault.

SWAN has repeatedly demanded that as a starting point boot camp should be integrated. Further, women Marines should be fully integrated into all occupations and units of the Marine Corps, and Marine Corps leadership must take a more active role in promoting the capabilities and qualities that women bring to the fight. There are many security challenges facing America today. Women Marines will play a critical role, especially in the Middle East, during the coming years.

ABOUT SWAN

SWAN seeks to be the nation’s largest, most influential and effective network of service women — fighting for their rights today, paving the way for their growth tomorrow. The mission of the Service Women’s Action Network is to support, connect and advocate for servicewomen past, present and future. Learn more at www.servicewomen.org.

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