

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Standing Committee, 76th meeting

**Statement by Ms. Diane Goodman,
Senior Coordinator, Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and
Sexual Harassment**

**Agenda Item: 2. (b) (ii). Efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse
and sexual harassment (EC/70/SC/CRP.20)**

18 September 2019

Check against delivery

Mister Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

Last year I took the floor in this forum for the first time to explain how, in the face of dreadful incidents of sexual misconduct in the humanitarian sector, UNHCR had taken a step change in its approach to address the issue.

I am pleased to come to you again, with confidence, and evidence, that we have made significant progress in the course of a year; thanks to the courage of survivors around the world who have come forward; thanks to colleagues who engage in action for workplaces of respect and integrity; thanks to the strong leadership of our senior managers; and thanks to Member States, partners and like-minded entities in the humanitarian sector who work towards making our organizations better versions of themselves.

I must however be candid, as we have been at UNHCR from the start of this dialogue, and recognize the complexities of this task and the challenges that continue to lie ahead. Over the past 18 months there has been a rise in the number of allegations of sexual misconduct. While we see this, in part, as our action bearing fruit, it also means that we have a long way to go on this collective journey, and there is no room for complacency.

I cannot, in one short statement, do justice to all the work underway, which we've strived to outline in the conference room paper, but I will focus on three particular areas: field based efforts on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse; our collaborative interagency work to address sexual misconduct; and our internal work on transformation and culture change.

Ensuring that displaced persons are protected from sexual exploitation and abuse is an integral part of our protection work, and, in particular, our broader efforts to prevent and respond to sexual and gender based violence in all its forms. At the heart of our engagement lies an overarching commitment to place survivors at the centre, using an age, gender and diversity approach.

This requires quality programmes for protection from sexual and gender-based violence as a whole; community outreach; effective feedback mechanisms (that include confidential reporting and are adapted to those most at risk); as well as solid multi-sectoral victim assistance services. Our ability to deliver on these multiple fronts is challenged by field realities, particularly in locations where services are scarce, security is volatile, humanitarian access is restricted, and operations are underfunded.

We are working hard to address these gaps in different contexts, and are convinced that these can often be better remedied in a joint approach locally. That is also why we invest so much in interagency collaboration on the ground.

[To provide a few examples:

1. In **Uganda**, we have seen a strong uptake for a new inter-agency helpline and email that provide direct information to refugees on issues of protection and service delivery, while enabling them to report on integrity issues, including SEA. Similar initiatives exist in **Afghanistan, Myanmar and Iraq** for internally displaced people.
2. In **Kenya**, through information kiosks, refugees are able to directly access information about their files and schedule their own interview appointments, which reduces the risks of refugees being exposed to potential extortion, exploitation or abuse by intermediaries.
3. In **Colombia**, a Regional Safe Spaces Network has been implemented to help improve coordination in case management involving sexual and gender-based violence and child protection, including SEA, and to ensure access to quality services, in collaboration with nearly 30 government partners and NGOs.]

As we move forward to replicate innovative initiatives such as these, , our work will be informed by the results of an independent evaluative review on UNHCR's policies and procedures on sexual exploitation and abuse which was issued in June of this year. We were encouraged by the fact that the review indicated that we are moving in the right direction, and that most of its recommendations are in line with ongoing or planned initiatives. At the same time we appreciate the guidance given on a number of key issues including the need for continued investment in mainstreaming PSEA through every aspect of our operations, addressing the multi-faceted barriers to reporting, and ensuring the safety and protection of victims. It also highlighted the importance of partnerships, and how UNHCR should continue to support inter-agency mechanisms and strengthen the engagement on PSEA across the UN system.

This leads to my second point. Recognizing that we must capitalize on interagency and wider partnerships to make a difference, our field collaboration has been mirrored by more effective cooperation at the global level to tackle both sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Our areas of engagement are wide ranging and include:

- the establishment of joint vetting and reference checking mechanisms to prevent transgressors from moving around the system;
- the development of a joint tool to assess and support the safeguarding capacity of our partners in the field;
- the contribution to meetings of investigatory bodies aimed to foster constructive dialogue and closer coordination, and integrate a victim-centred approach to investigations;
- the adaptation for interagency training purposes of an innovative face-to-face SEA learning package developed by IOM, which will also include a component on addressing SH;
- the establishment of a fund to support partners to develop and disseminate PSEA outreach and communications materials that are tailored to local needs and realities.

Institutionally, we are also taking on roles that allow us to best contribute to the global advances in the sector; we are co-chairing the IASC group that focuses on the eradication of SEA and SH in the humanitarian system; the Deputy High Commissioner is interim Chair of the UN Chief Executives Board Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment; and, the High Commissioner has recently assumed the role of IASC Champion on protection from SEA and SH. His priorities as Champion aim at bolstering prevention; expanding safe spaces to ensure victims can speak out, and promoting respectful working cultures.

This brings me to my **third area of focus: our internal work on transformation and culture change**, which is very much in line with this Championship priority. Sexual misconduct is rooted in imbalances of power and gender inequalities and there is an increasing recognition among organisations that culture change is essential to prevent sexual misconduct in the long term. We need to reflect on how we use power and privilege and ensure that we create workplaces of respect and accountability, where misconduct is not tolerated, and where senior management communicates, embodies and enforces ethical standards.

Tackling issues of lack of trust and fear of speaking up are critical to effect this transformation. We have looked for new and innovative ways to listen to and exchange with colleagues, such as through informal dialogues led by the High Commissioner and Deputy High Commissioner broadcast live around the world where questions could be asked via pigeonhole. We have also tried to encourage open and sustained conversations between colleagues on somewhat uncomfortable issues. Last year we launched an internal challenge on how to prevent sexual harassment. This provided the opportunity for colleagues across the organization – often in the most remote locations – to engage in conversation and share ideas through our Innovations Platform. Our yearly dialogues on UNHCR’s Code of conduct have also been redesigned; they aim to increase trust and integrity and foster conversations which ultimately lead to behavioral change.

In the framework of our broader transformation and regionalization exercise, we have taken several opportunities to spend time with our most senior leaders and managers, including those leading the new Bureaux, having honest and open discussions on key elements of our organizational culture, both the positive and those areas where we need to improve. In addition, we have just started rolling out “Reflective Leadership Dialogues” that focus on managers as agents of change towards more respectful and misconduct-free working environments.

For those with an interest in this topic, we encourage you to join us in a panel discussion in the margins of our Executive Committee, where we will explore what it takes to build and sustain organizational cultures that are respectful, collaborative, innovative, inclusive and safe from sexual misconduct

I wish to conclude by appreciating the strong support expressed by Member States on several occasions for our efforts to eradicate sexual misconduct. Your engagement is critical, and we are very grateful in particular for initiatives aimed at establishing common standards.

I would also like to reiterate the point made in my introduction; while we have made progress, much much more remains to be done. We at UNHCR remain as intent and

committed as ever to stay on this strong integrity path, until those who remain silent feel safe to speak out, until closure comes to each of those that need it, and until Protection in the broadest sense -which is our raison d'être - is a reality for all, persons of concern and humanitarian workers alike.

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