

REPORT¹

Dialogue with UN Member States: Update on the work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations, 8 February 2021

Background

On **February 8, 2021**, the first **Dialogue with UN Member States: Update on the work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations** took place. These dialogues are part of the CEB Task Force's ongoing efforts to engage actors from within and outside of the UN to strengthen approaches and actions to sexual harassment. This is the objective of the Task Force's **Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream** which is **led jointly by ASG Martha Helena Lopez and Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia**.

The meeting was co-hosted by the Member States Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the UN Secretariat as well as UN Women.

1. Welcome

The facilitator, Ms. **Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women welcomed **over 160 participants** to the meeting which was co-hosted by the Group of Friends to eliminate sexual harassment and the UN Secretariat as well as UN Women.

She outlined the three-fold **purpose** of the event: One, to **inform** UN Member States and the UN system about efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment within the UN system; Two, to foster **peer-to-peer learning** on addressing sexual harassment within international organizations and beyond; Three, to initiate a dialogue on continued **joint efforts** to prevent sexual harassment within the UN System.

2. Opening

Deputy High Commissioner **Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on addressing sexual harassment within the Organizations of the UN system, thanked the participants, panelists and the Group of Friends for their engagement in the important dialogue.

She highlighted that **COVID-19** has impacted the way that the UN works and like the virus, sexual harassment has mutated and therefore the UN's tools to tackle sexual harassment need to adapt. She gave the example of inappropriate conduct on video meetings and that the [Code of Conduct](#) to Prevent Harassment Including Sexual Harassment at UN System Events can and should be applied to online events. The code was shared and applied to this event.

Deputy High Commissioner Clements informed colleagues that the **Task Force was established in 2017** by the Secretary-General and UN leadership in the Chief Executives Board for Coordination to **develop a common United Nations system approach** towards sexual harassment, and brings together senior managers from across the system. She assured colleagues that addressing sexual harassment **remains a priority** for the Secretary-General and the UN System.

¹ Report prepared by the Office of the Focal Point for Women in the UN system at UN Women.

She outlined some of the important **progress of the Task Force**: the UN system [Model Policy](#) on Sexual Harassment which is being implemented throughout the system; the [Code of Conduct](#) to Prevent Harassment Including Sexual Harassment at UN System Events; and the [“Clear Check” Database](#) which allows for vetting and reference checking to avoid the hiring and re-hiring of individuals who were dismissed after an investigation determined they committed sexual harassment, which strengthens accountability within the UN System. The release of a new **Manual for the Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints**, which will bolster investigative capacity, harmonize victim-centered investigations, and improve communications with victims and other stakeholders during investigations is also imminent.

The Task Force's work plan **priorities** going forward were outlined, including: strengthening a **victim-centered approach**; ensuring that **training and communications materials** are accessible to personnel around the world; **rolling out and monitoring the common tools** to promote accountability; **strengthening outreach and knowledge sharing**; and **leadership and culture change** as all the tools, trainings and briefings in the world will have little effect if we do not address head-on underlying issues of values, attitudes, behaviour and culture; and working closely with **interrelated issues** such as especially sexual exploitation and abuse of authority with gender inequality and power imbalances at its core.

Deputy High Commissioner Clements made clear that addressing the root causes of sexual misconduct and creating workplaces of respect, inclusion and accountability, are tasks beyond the scope of any single Task Force, which is why she was looking forward to **working collaboratively** including through this dialogue.

3. Update from UN Secretariat and workstream on Outreach and Knowledge Sharing

ASG Lopez provided an overview of Secretary-General's and UN system leaders' **commitment to practicing a zero-tolerance approach** to sexual harassment and progress in the areas of **policy, accountability, support, outreach and strengthening investigations**.

The UN Secretariat's **revised policy on sexual harassment** was published in September 2019 in the Secretary-General's Bulletin Addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority (ST/SGB/2019/8). This policy specifies that the Organization shall request that contractors, suppliers and partners adhere to the zero-tolerance policy on prohibited conduct and commit to taking adequate action if faced with allegations of prohibited conduct, and inform them that failure to do so may lead to the termination of contractual arrangements. It also specifies that staff members shall demonstrate commitment to zero tolerance of any prohibited conduct and treat all people in the workplace courteously and with dignity and respect, as well as with an awareness of their own behaviour and how it may be perceived and/or received by others. A **companion comprehensive guidance document** for staff, the United to Respect toolkit, was available online on iSeek and the HR Portal in January 2020.

The UN has **strengthened investigations systems**. The Office of Internal Oversight Service (OIOS) has a specialized team focused on sexual harassment, mostly comprised of women. All investigations of this nature are fast-tracked. The UN has **improved support and reporting systems**: A 24-hour Secretariat Helpline ('Speak-Up') was established in February 2018 to give staff information and confidential support as well as facilitate reporting.

Progress on **raising awareness** includes that staff must complete a mandatory training programme on prevention of sexual harassment and abuse. United to Respect dialogues provide UN specific training materials to be used by heads of departments/offices to facilitate the mandated in person (even if

virtual) trainings under ST/SGB/2019/8, which were developed during 2019/20. During 2020, almost 100 personnel were trained on the United to Respect dialogues to enable them to conduct trainings in their entities.

ClearCheck is currently implemented by 25 CEB Member Organizations. There are continued efforts to conduct outreach/awareness-raising about the ClearCheck system with CEB entities and provide training or training modules on the use of ClearCheck. Work is also progressing to further operationalize the ClearCheck system by undertaking and ensuring closer integration with CEB organizational talent management systems and compliance with best IT practices, including those regarding data-protection/management.

ASG Lopez outlined the endorsed **workplan of CEB Task Force** and the planned actions of the **Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream** which aim **to engage actors from within and outside of the UN system** on issues of sexual harassment to better understand and strengthen approaches and actions to address sexual harassment.

The first priority is continuing **cooperation and coordination with stakeholders and mechanisms** within and outside of the UN System, the Network of **Gender Focal Points** in the UN System, the Development Cooperation Office (**DCO**), intergovernmental systems to harness synergies, cross-fertilize and share knowledge and material to end sexual harassment.

The second aspect of the workstream is accessing the current **usage of the Clear Check database** and based on the analysis strongly encourage the usage of the database by all UN system entities, target the further integration with organizational talent management systems and consider the possibility and practicability of expanding the database to organizations outside of the UN system.

The third expected output is to **enhance targeted communication** to external audiences to disseminate information about the UN system's efforts to eradicate sexual harassment, including periodic briefings and dialogues with **Member States**. Prior to that, the development of a **knowledge sharing platform** is also moving forward thanks to the joint efforts by UN Women and CEB Secretariat.

ASG Lopez welcomed inputs from Member States as part of the **funding of these initiatives**, such as the knowledge sharing platform and the communications campaign, to capitalize on the momentum and build on the activities being planned.

4. Peer-to-peer learning

Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, moderated the peer-to-peer learning discussion with the following panel:

- **H.E. Mr. Martin Kimani**, Permanent Representative of Kenya
- **H.E. Ms. Yoka Brandt**, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
- **H.E. Mr. Jonathan Allen**, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom
- **Ms. Susanna Moorehead**, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- **Ms. Kalpana Kochhar**, Director, Human Resources Department, International Monetary Fund
- **Mr. Jorge Dajani**, Chief Ethics Officer, World Bank Group

The panellists identified several common themes and specific actions to prevent, address and ultimately eradicate sexual harassment.

Ambassadors Kimani, Brandt and Allen made clear that addressing sexual harassment requires a **proactive approach and continued attention**. Similarly, Ms. Moorehead emphasised that it is important to continue to prioritise efforts to address sexual harassment during the pandemic.

All the panellists emphasised the importance of establishing **clear procedures and policies** to address sexual harassment. Ambassadors Kimani and Brandt expressed that their missions were proud to have founded the **Group of Friends to eliminate sexual harassment**, along with Israel and France, which has been actively involved in some of the work of the CEB Task Force, including the development of the Code of Conduct for UN System events. The Ambassadors encourage the continued and expansive use of these policies and other Task Force initiatives. Ms. Kochhar shared that the IMF had undertaken several reviews of their policies, including creating specific policies for colleagues travelling on mission, standardising reporting across all departments and implementing an anonymous hotline.

Mandatory training on supporting a safe working environment was raised as important tool to tackle sexual harassment. For example, the UK Foreign Office has implemented Respect at Work Training as an integral part of being a line manager. Furthermore, Ambassador Allen suggested that organizations could train staff on ways to use technology to tackle sexual harassment, for example recording inappropriate behaviour during video calls, and/or implementing an easy report mechanism during online meetings.

Crucially, **resources** are needed to tackle sexual harassment. For example, **specialist staff** were hired at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UK Foreign Office and the World Bank. Ambassador Allen also encouraged colleagues to advocate for resources in the **UN's Fifth Committee**.

All panellists expressed that **transforming organizational culture** was essential to tackling sexual harassment. Policies and procedures must be accompanied by a culture of respect and trust. One way to work towards this culture is for **leadership to make clear their commitment** to addressing sexual harassment; for example, through **videos**, as has been practiced in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UK Foreign Office, and that the CEB Task Force hopes to implement throughout the UN System.

In addition, colleagues emphasised the importance of **women's leadership and participation** throughout all levels of the organization. Ambassador Kimani shared that the Kenyan mission undertook a gender analysis of how power and responsibility is apportioned in the workplace and emphasised that a crucial part of addressing sexual harassment is ensuring that women are in positions to make decisions and participate fully and equally in the workplace. Ms. Moorehead emphasised that women's leadership shifts the balance of power. Ms. Kalpana Kochhar, Director, Human Resources Department, International Monetary Fund indicated that the last two Managing Directors of the IMF are women and that 35% of department directors of women with a goal of 50% women by 2025.

Colleagues emphasised the challenges of and importance of **transparency**. Policies need to be visible and communicated regular to all colleagues. For example, Mr. Dajani shared that the World Bank had implemented a communications campaign with infographics to ensure that colleagues understood their rights and responsibilities. In addition, Ambassador Brandt, Ambassador Allen and Ms. Kochhar recommended that organizations share information about the types of cases and disciplinary action with staff in the organization while ensuring privacy and confidentiality of the specific people involved in the cases.

The importance of adopting a **victim/survivor-centred approach** was emphasised. For example, Ambassador Brandt raised the importance of after-care and Mr. Jorge Dajani, Chief Ethics Officer,

World Bank Group discussed the importance of engaging colleagues to understand what they need to make them feel comfortable to report and adapting their procedures.

The importance of the UN **leading by example** was raised by panellists. Ambassador Kimani emphasised that Member States should lead by example within the UN system and Ambassador Brandt expressed that the UN has to set an international example of ethical behaviour.

Finally, colleagues expressed the importance of forums like this dialogue to **share information and good practice**. For example, Ms. Kochhar indicated that the IMF will look into the ClearCheck Database after hearing about it at this event. Ambassador Brandt warmly welcomed the development of the Knowledge Sharing Platform by the CEB Task Force and asked that Member States are involved and have access. Several panellists emphasised the importance of working collaboratively wider within the international community including with civil society through partnership agreements and other initiatives.