

## EVENT REPORT SUMMARY

**“Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer to peer learning on prevention and elimination of sexual harassment” (Side event during the 65th session of the Commission of the Status of Women)**

### **Background**

On **March 17, 2021**, **“Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer to peer learning on prevention and elimination of sexual harassment”**, a side event during the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission of the Status of Women, took place. This event was 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 jointly organized by the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations, the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, the UN Secretariat and UN Women.

### **1. Welcome**

The facilitator, Ms. **Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System at UN Women, welcomed the speakers and **over 240 participants** from inside and outside the UN System. She noted that the event adhered to the [Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System Events](#).

She outlined the three-fold **purpose** of the event: One, to **inform** the Civil Society Representatives and UN Member States about efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment within the UN system; Two, foster **peer to peer learning** on addressing and preventing sexual harassment and implementing a victim-centered approach; and Three, to deepen the dialogue on continued **joint efforts** to prevent sexual harassment within the UN System.

Ms. Pehrman referenced the **Secretary General’s** opening of CSW a few days prior in which he said: **“we need to move beyond fixing women and instead fix our systems”**. She acknowledged that sexual harassment can target anyone, but that women are disproportionately impacted and most cases are committed against women.

### **2. Opening Remarks**

**H.E. Mr. Alie Kabba**, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and the President of the Executive Board of UN Women, emphasised the importance of a **zero-tolerance** approach. Since sexual harassment is a **problem of the gender power imbalance**, he pointed out that it is important to work towards equal rights within the UN system, our countries and communities. He recognised that sexual harassment is a problem in all sectors, **goes against the fundamental values of the UN**, and is an impediment to the UN’s work around the world.

Ms. Pehrman thanked his excellency for his remarks, commitment and leadership in the Executive Board of UN Women.

### **3. Welcome from the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment**

H.E. Mr. Gilad Erdan, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations, expressed that both the Group of Friends and Israel were proud to be part of the efforts in working towards addressing sexual harassment. He highlighted that COVID-19 has altered our world and that efforts towards sexual harassment must **adapt to our changing workplaces**. In particular, he highlighted the increase in **online sexual harassment** and Israel's national legislative efforts on this issue.

In thanking the excellency for his remarks and leadership, Ms. Pehrman also expressed appreciation for the reference to online sexual harassment and shared the **UN Women resource on [How to address online sexual harassment during COVID-19](#)**.

### **4. Update from the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment**

Deputy High Commissioner **Kelly T. Clements**, Chair of the CEB Task Force on addressing sexual harassment within the Organizations of the UN system expressed that while we collectively work to overcome the the harm caused by COVID-19, including its exacerbating effect on inequality, the UN system must work towards creating **more inclusive and accountable working environments**, free of sexual harassment, where all colleagues feel respected and included.

She 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 outlined some of its important progress: 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. 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.

Recognizing that sexual harassment is rooted in power differentials and power imbalances, the Deputy High Commissioner noted that the Task Force is engaged in tackling those underlying causes, with a focus on **organizational culture and leadership**. For example, the Task Force engaged in a session in culture change itself and is developing preparing on Facilitators Guide which will enable Task Force members to hold similar dialogues with leaders in their own organizations.

The Task Force is steering the UN towards always putting **victims and survivors at the centre** of our efforts to tackle sexual harassment. For example, the Task Force is developing a voluntary and anonymous survey to capture victim feedback on how they experienced the response and support provided, and a UN-wide common understanding of what a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment means, including definitions and principles, to help ensure that support is appropriate for survivors and provided in a way that is respectful, empathetic and empowering.

She also noted the importance of working closely **interrelated issues** such as especially sexual exploitation and abuse of authority with gender inequality and power imbalances at its core. She expressed the Task Force's commitment to **learning and applying best practices** from within and beyond the UN system, such as through participation of this event.

**Ms. Pehrman** thanked the Deputy High Commissioner, dear Kelly, for her remarks, her valuable work, especially for steering the UN towards **putting victims and survivors at the centre** of the efforts.

#### **5. Peer to Peer Learning Dialogue**

**Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, UN Women, reiterated the purpose of the event to **to learn from different perspectives and good examples** to foster **collective action and responsibility** to eradicate sexual harassment. As Co-Chair of the Task Force's **Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream**, she shared that the UN is working to improve transparency including through creating a **knowledge hub** and strengthening **communications internally and externally**.

She moderated the peer-to-peer learning discussion with the following panel:

- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Mr. Monroe France**, Associate Vice President for Global Engagement and Inclusive Leadership, New York University
- **H.E. Ms. Nathalie Estival-Broadhurst**, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations
- **Ms. Jane Connors**, Victims' Rights Advocate, United Nations
- **Ms. Deeba Syed**, Senior Legal Officer, Rights of Women
- **Mr. Ib Petersen**, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA
- **Dr. Kemi DaSilva – Ibru**, Founder and Director, Women at Risk International Foundation

The important role of **leadership** was emphasised. For example, Mr. Petersen expressed the importance of all managers setting a clear tone and taking clear action on sexual harassment. He advocated that it is critical to ensure that all the tools to tackle sexual harassment are clearly understood through awareness-raising and training. He pointed to the need to establish trust in the workplace so that people feel confident to speak up, and to improve work environments.

Similarly, the importance of **leading by example** was raised. H.E. Ms. Estival-Broadhurst shared the national efforts that France had taken to address sexual harassment, for example through the 'Ask Angela' programme in which victims can approach a 'safe haven' bar or restaurant and request to speak to Angela to indicate that they needed support. At a Ministry level, a dedicated unit has been put in place to prevent and address harassment, for example through tackling myths and setting up a hotline.

Furthermore, panellists pointed to the need for **accountability**. As an example, ASG Lopez shared that ClearCheck is currently implemented by 25 CEB Member Organizations. Work is also progressing to expand the ClearCheck System across the international community and integrate it with organizational systems and compliance with best IT practices, including those regarding data-protection/management.

The importance of adopting a **victim/survivor-centred approach** was made clear. Ms. Connors expressed that sexual harassment should be seen as an issue of **workplace safety**. She outlined key principles of the approach that is being developed in **consultation with victims**. These include: respecting the integrity of the victim by listening without judgement, ensuring protection from retaliation and re-traumatisation, re-prioritising focus from protecting organizational reputation to ensuring victim's rights, practising confidentiality, providing information and support to victims, and focussing on prevention.

Centering the experiences of victims, Ms. Syed shared the common themes of working with victims from different sectors. She highlighted that by the time many women take the step to report, they have often already suffered in trying to improve their situations with real costs, including **retaliation**, only to be re-traumatized by inadequate processes. She urged for the importance of **trauma-informed training for investigators** and gaining feedback from victims to improve processes.

Importantly, panellists pointed to the need to recognise the **root causes** of sexual harassment in societies. As an example, Dr. DaSilva-Ibru shared that her organization works with secondary school girls and boys to tackle the early socialization of gender-based violence within a patriarchal structure. She pointed to the "shadow pandemic" of gender-based violence in her country and around the world.

In addition, the need for incorporating an understanding of **intersectionality** into preventing and addressing sexual harassment was raised. Mr. France pointed out that those of minoritized identities, such as women of colour, LGBTQI+ women and women with disabilities may experience multiple layers of discrimination because of structural inequalities. He advocated for the importance of a **research-driven, diversity and inclusion approach** that understands layered identities and structures.

Finally, colleagues expressed the importance of forums like this event to **share information and good practice**. ASG Lopez also recalled the productive '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' that took place on 8 February 2021.