



United
Nations



MAKING ZERO TOLERANCE A REALITY:

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING TO PREVENT AND ELIMINATE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE UN SYSTEM AND BEYOND

Overview of the reflections on the peer-to-peer learning dialogues organized as part of the outreach and knowledge sharing efforts of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

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This publication is based on the peer-to-peer learning dialogues conducted in the context of Workstream 4 of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN system, co-led by Assistant Secretary-General Anita Bhatia (UN Women) and Assistant Secretary-General Martha Helena Lopez (UN Secretariat).

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INTRODUCTION

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) [Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN system](#) was established in 2017 by the Secretary-General to develop a common United Nations system approach to tackle sexual harassment by bringing together senior managers from across the organization. The [Chief Executives Board for Coordination](#) is the longest-standing highest-level coordination forum of the United Nations system. As the Task Force states: “Leaders of UN System organizations reiterate their firm commitment to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment; to strengthen victim-centred prevention and response efforts; and to foster a safe and inclusive working environment.”¹

The work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment is organized into five workstreams:

1. Implement: Support the roll-out of products endorsed by HLCM;
2. Strengthen: Advance a victim-centered approach to tackling sexual harassment;
3. Learning and Communication;
4. Outreach and Knowledge Sharing; and
5. Leadership and Culture.

The CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment has made substantial progress, including on strengthening investigations, developing a [UN system Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](#), creating a [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#), launching the Code of [Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System events](#), and implementing the [ClearCheck](#) Screening Database. While the UN has taken important steps to develop policies and guidance, challenges remain with their implementation.

¹ [CEB Statement on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of The UN System, 2018](#)

This is a timely moment for this dialogue, given emerging evidence that, like the virus itself, working remotely has helped sexual harassment mutate remotely, moving online in different forms that we are only beginning to understand. We also realize that many of the systems and the tools that we have built to support survivors and investigate allegations also need adaptation to our new ways of working. With disruption comes opportunity, and that is true in this context as well.

– Ms. Kelly T. Clements, Vice-Chair High-Level Committee on Management, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING DIALOGUES

To strengthen outreach and the sharing of knowledge, in 2021, the Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream of the Task Force hosted four peer-to-peer learning dialogues. This workstream is jointly led by Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources of the UN Secretariat and Ms. Anita Bhatia, Assistant Secretary-General for Resource Management, Sustainability and Partnerships and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women.

One advantage of the pandemic's push towards mass remote working has been the opportunity to bring together partners from all over the world in a virtual space. Collectively, the dialogues featured thirty different speakers and reached over 600 members of the international community. At these events, Member States, civil society actors and leadership from UN organizations and entities shared good practices and recommendations on how to work collaboratively to enhance accountability in addressing, preventing and ultimately eliminating sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond.

The peer-to-peer dialogues aimed to inform and inspire UN organizations regarding efforts to tackle sexual harassment within the UN system and beyond, as well as enable peer-to-peer learning. Specifically, the dialogues had a three-fold purpose: 1. **inform the international community** about efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment within the UN system; 2. **identify good practices** and efforts being undertaken to tackle sexual harassment by UN actors, Member States, civil society representatives, international financial institutions and the private sector; and 3. **deepen the dialogue** on continued joint efforts to prevent sexual harassment within the UN system.

The first dialogue took place virtually in February 2021 together with the Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment and provided an update on the work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment. Given its success, subsequent dialogues were expanded to include the wider international community. In March, the second dialogue took place alongside the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, with the focus on learning from civil society partners. The third dialogue was held in May and concentrated on driving cultural change within the organization to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. The focus of the fourth dialogue in June was on addressing online sexual harassment.

All dialogues were hosted by UN Women, the UN Secretariat and the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment. The Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment joined as co-hosts of the February and March dialogues, while the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations was another co-host of the March event.

In the spirit of modelling good practice, all dialogues adhered to the [Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment at UN System events](#). Participants were informed of the Code, which was shown and referred to at the beginning of the meeting and the link was shared in the virtual meeting chat.

At the dialogues, Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Martha Helena Lopez updated participants on the Outreach and Knowledge Sharing workstream. Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia led the moderation of the peer-to-peer learning dialogue in each event. In the first three events, Deputy High Commissioner Kelly T. Clements, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, provided an update on the work and efforts of the Task Force. All the events were facilitated by Ms. Katja Pehrman, Senior Advisor and Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women.

Each event comprised of a diverse range of speakers from the international community who engaged with each other and the audience. The speakers shared testimonies and common experiences from victims/survivors of sexual harassment. They expressed that the fundamental values of equality and diversity need to be practised and offered clear suggestions regarding how the United Nations can work together to properly address, prevent, and ultimately eradicate, sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond.

Speakers discussed insidious patterns of sexual harassment across professional sectors, geographic locations and time periods, as well the context-specific nature of sexual harassment in the UN and at this particular moment in history. For example, the phenomenon of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the manifestation of sexual harassment in a variety of ways, including online platforms. As observed by the Chair of the CEB Task Force, Deputy High Commissioner Ms. Kelly Clements: “This is a timely moment for this dialogue, given emerging evidence that, like the virus itself, working remotely has helped sexual harassment mutate remotely, moving online in different forms that we are only beginning to understand. We also realize that many of the systems and the tools that we have built to support survivors and investigate allegations also need adaptation to our new ways of working. With disruption comes opportunity, and that is true in this context as well.” Indeed, these new ways of working have underlined the urgency of collaboration in tackling sexual harassment.

KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While each peer-to-peer dialogue featured a different focus, common themes emerged from the four events. A summary of the main points presented at these dialogues, and proposed actions to eradicate sexual harassment within the UN system are outlined below.



1. Build and safeguard an inclusive working environment to prevent sexual harassment

As the world's largest universal multilateral international organization, the United Nations inspires people from around the world to join its mission of maintaining peace, advancing human rights, and promoting justice, equality, and development. Its core values include integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity. It is vital to create a culture, therefore, that fosters an **inclusive, enabling, and accountable working environment, free of sexual harassment**, where all colleagues feel welcome, respected, and valued for their contributions. It was recommended that policies and procedures are informed by a research-driven approach that ensures gender equality, diversity and inclusion, by including the experiences of marginalized groups in examples and case studies featured in training. Moreover, it was proposed that these **policies and procedures need to be accompanied by a culture of respect and trust** within the organization. Recommended resources include the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#), its [Supplementary Guidance](#), and the [Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines](#).



2. Demonstrate leadership commitment to eradicate sexual harassment

It is critical that managers and other leadership set a clear tone and take action to prevent and eradicate sexual harassment. For instance, it is important to **ensure that all the tools available to address and tackle sexual harassment are clearly understood through communication, awareness-raising, and training**. An identified good practice in this regard is the signing of a gender pledge by every employee and making a visible commitment at the time of joining the organization. While it is the responsibility of **leadership in the UN system to lead by example and ensure adherence to the policies**, including taking corrective action, everyone has a responsibility to foster an enabling working environment free from harassment by individuals or groups.²

Panellists also suggest a **feminist leadership approach to address the root causes of gender inequality**. Such an approach moves from a 'power over' leadership model to one of 'power with', 'power within' and 'power to' by dismantling power relationships that enable and uphold the marginalization of individuals or groups within the organization. It questions existing structures of power and privilege, which often shape the experiences of sexual harassment, and brings attention to issues such as age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and gender. Moreover, a feminist approach builds a culture of trust and accountability within the system for preventing, identifying and reporting sexual harassment.

² Resources include UN Women publications [Towards an End to Sexual Harassment](#) and [What Will It Take? Promoting Cultural Change to End Sexual Harassment](#).



3. Strengthen, advance and implement a victim/survivor-centred approach

Furthermore, as recommended, it is of utmost importance to strengthen, advance and implement a **victim/survivor-centred approach**. Key principles of this approach include placing the victim at the centre of all prevention and response efforts, respecting the integrity of the victim by listening without judgement, ensuring protection from retaliation and re-traumatization, re-prioritizing focus from protecting organization's reputation to ensuring victims' rights, practising confidentiality, providing information and support to victims, and focusing on prevention. In addition, it is critical to provide **trauma-informed training for investigators** and gain feedback from victims to improve processes.

Panellists recommended that sexual harassment should be seen as a system-wide issue of **workplace safety**, and that a victim/survivor-centred approach to prevention and response should be institutionalized throughout the United Nations. It is vital to mainstream a victims' rights approach across the UN system, enhancing coordination efforts at both policy and operational levels. Important steps have been taken towards achieving this, including the appointment of a Victims' Rights Advocate (VRA) to operationalize a victims' rights-centred approach; the implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's "championship" strategy for addressing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment; and the Victims' Assistance Protocol developed by UNICEF and the UN Secretariat's Conduct and Discipline Service. The second workstream of the CEB Task Force, "Advance a victim-centred approach to tackling sexual harassment", led by VRA Ms. Jane Connors, has developed the document [Advancing a Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System](#). The paper aims to develop a common understanding of a victim/survivor-centered approach to sexual harassment, thereby enabling a consistent system-wide response.



4. Implement existing policies and tools

As highlighted in the dialogues, progress has been made on the implementation of the UN system [Model Policy](#) on Sexual Harassment; 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 had committed sexual harassment. Most recently, the [Guide for Managers: Prevention of, and Response to, Sexual Harassment in the Workplace](#) and the [Investigators' Manual: Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints](#) have been developed.

Monitoring of the implementation of policies and tools is crucial to enhance prevention and response efforts. Participants recommended regular collection of feedback from all entities to continuously improve joint efforts.³

³ Workstream One of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment titled 'Implement: Support the roll-out of products endorsed by HLCM', is responsible for monitoring and implementation.



5. Provide clear and regular guidance

It is vital to establish clear procedures and policies, such as the Code of Conduct for UN System Events to address sexual harassment. It is also critical to conduct **reviews of policies and to create specific policies for personnel travelling on mission**. It is important to standardize reporting across all departments and implement an anonymous hotline. As participants emphasized, the UN has already **improved support and reporting systems**. In February 2018, a 24-hour Secretariat Helpline (Speak-Up) was established to give staff useful information and confidential support as well as to facilitate reporting.

Further recommendations included that **policies are visible and communicated regularly to all personnel** – for example, through a communications campaign with infographics to help colleagues understand their rights and responsibilities. To foster transparency, organizations are encouraged to **share information about the types of cases and disciplinary action** taken regarding staff in the organization, while **ensuring the privacy and confidentiality** of everyone involved.

It is also helpful to communicate the **benefits of transforming organizational culture to address sexual harassment** beyond the values of human rights and equality. As indicated during the dialogues, for instance, **sexual harassment is an issue of risk management**. Sexual harassment decreases productivity and retention, and it undermines the ability of the organization to achieve its goals.



6. Strengthen efforts to reach gender balance

Sexual harassment is the result of **gender power imbalance**, as stressed by many participants. Sexual harassment can be used as a mechanism to assert unequal power relationships; it is both a symptom and a driver of male dominance.

When addressing sexual harassment, it is key to **ensure that women are in positions to make decisions and participate fully and equally in the workplace**. Indeed, women's leadership and full participation throughout all levels of the organization is critical. Importantly, the lack of diverse women's voices in decision-making hampers the organization's ability to safeguard not only UN personnel but also the populations it serves.

Structural changes to meaningfully include the participation of young and diverse women as leaders is crucial to reshape organizational culture and push for **deeper programmatic transformation**.



7. Address intersectionality

An understanding of equality and **intersectionality is important to prevent and address sexual harassment**. Minoritized identities, such as women of colour, LGBTQI+ women and women with disabilities may experience multiple layers of discrimination because of structural inequalities. Prevention and response efforts should be informed by the diverse experiences of victims/survivors and their particular societal and cultural norms since these impact both their access to support and ability to report sexual harassment.⁴

4 For more information about intersectionality, please see the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term. For example, see: [Columbia Law School. 2017. Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality. More than Two Decades Later.](#)

As shared by the experts in the dialogues, the **community-based complaints mechanism and networks** that are in place throughout peace operations and humanitarian settings offer **reporting pathways** that are secure and culturally appropriate for victims and whistle-blowers. These mechanisms are developed hand-in-hand with community members to inform design and facilitation. Such processes could be used in both Country Offices and Headquarters to create reporting pathways for sexual harassment complaints to be received.⁵



8. Strengthen accountability

The need for strengthened **accountability** was identified as a **crucial factor to tackle sexual harassment**, for example, through expanding the [ClearCheck](#) database across the international community and integrating it into organizational systems, in compliance with best IT practices including data-protection. Accountability should also be fostered through strengthened investigations systems.

As was explained by the panellists, one of the investigative bodies within the UN System, the Office of Internal Oversight Service (OIOS), has a specialized team focused on sexual harassment. All investigations of this nature are fast-tracked. The release of a new [Manual for the Investigation of Sexual Harassment Complaints](#) will bolster investigative capacity, harmonize victim-centred investigations, and improve communication with victims and other stakeholders during investigations.



9. Engage men

Participants suggested that engaging male colleagues as allies is an effective way to address sexual harassment; a specific **male allyship strategy** with clear action points could be created. Furthermore, conversations between male and female employees on their workplace experiences is key for men to develop **situational awareness** and **transform their perspectives**. Attendees also recommended that diversity and inclusion efforts are framed as core leadership issues and are tied to organizational outcomes.



10. Provide training and organizational learning

Participants noted that **mandatory training** supports the building of a safe and enabling working environment to tackle sexual harassment. This can be implemented, for example, through [Respect at Work Training](#). Specific, mandatory, and evidence-based bystander training should likewise be implemented.⁶ Personnel can also be trained on the use of technology to tackle sexual harassment by, for example, recording inappropriate behaviour during video calls and/or implementing a reporting mechanism during online meetings. Moreover, long-term and context-specific capacity-building programmes can be effective in transforming power relations in organizations, rather than one-off training programmes.

⁵ Please note that there are also specific sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) community-based complaints mechanisms and networks.

⁶ For more guidance, see the UN Women resource: [Stepping up to the challenge: Towards international standards on training to end sexual harassment](#).



11. Share and showcase good practice and collaboration

Sharing and showcasing good practice can be expanded through working collaboratively with the wider international community – academia, the private sector and civil society – through partnership agreements and other initiatives. One of the objectives of the CEB Task Force is to create a **knowledge hub** to share and showcase good practice examples across the UN system.

Moreover, UN Women hosts a repository of **good practice examples from within the UN system for the system-wide network of UN Gender Focal Points (GFPs)**.⁷ This network works towards achieving gender parity and creating enabling work environments free of sexual harassment. Participants recommend the appointment of at least one Gender Focal Point or Focal Point for Women (and an alternate) in each UN department, service or office, including an Office away from Headquarters; special political or peacekeeping mission; regional commission; Resident or Regional Coordinator's Office; or any other unit tasked with programmed entities. The UN system would benefit from the GFP Network's support in prevention, response and eradication efforts regarding sexual harassment.⁸



12. Address online sexual harassment

As the COVID-19 pandemic alters the world of work, it is important that efforts towards ending sexual harassment likewise adapt to changing workplaces, **in particular regarding online sexual harassment**. Participants recommended the revision of organizational policies, bulletins, and documents referring to sexual harassment to reflect the **new realities of online working environments**.

Participants also noted that sexual harassment, including online sexual harassment, can take the form of a single act and have devastating consequences for the victim. If sexual harassment is merely defined as a pattern of conduct, this can undermine the victims'/ survivors' confidence in reporting a stand-alone incident.⁹ Therefore, participants called for a **comprehensive and system-wide definition** of what constitutes online sexual harassment and how to respond to it, to ensure the protection and safety of all UN personnel online.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is important that **the Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment Including Sexual Harassment at UN System Events** is applied to all online events. Due to the new nature of online sexual harassment, further efforts are needed to gain a deeper understanding of the issue and to **develop appropriate training that showcases real-life scenarios and strengthens digital citizen education**.¹¹

7 This information is available on the Gender Focal Points Extranet. If you are a Gender Focal Point and do not have access, please contact the Office of the Focal Point for Women focalpoint.forwomen@unwomen.org.

8 Each department, office, regional commission and mission is required to have at least one Gender Focal Point as stipulated by the Secretary-General's bulletin on departmental focal points for women in the UN Secretariat ([ST/SGB/2008/12](#)) and the [System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#) (p.44).

9 For a definition of sexual harassment, please refer to the [UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](#).

10 UN Women has created guidance documents to [address online sexual harassment](#) and foster inclusivity online during the COVID-19 [pandemic](#). For more guidance, see the UN Women resource [Stepping up to the challenge: Towards international standards on training to end sexual harassment](#).

11 [The Ripple Effect: COVID-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse](#), published by Glitch UK and End Violence Against Women Coalition, highlights the need for an intersectional approach as women of color and other minorities are more vulnerable to online sexual harassment and have a tendency to not report such incidents.



DIALOGUE ONE

Dialogue with UN Member States: Update on the work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment

“We have to collaborate across the international system, the bilateral, the multilateral, the embassies, the CSOs, the private sector and others.”

– Ms. Susanna Moorehead, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee,
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

When

8 February 2021

Hosts

UN Women, UN Secretariat, CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, UN Member States Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Martin Kimani**, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations
- **H.E. Ms. Yoka Brandt**, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations
- **H.E. Mr. Jonathan Allen**, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Vice-Chair High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

- **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

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor, Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 160 participants from the international community, primarily within the UN System.

Summary

“Sexual harassment results from a culture of discrimination and privilege based on centuries of unequal gender relations and power dynamics. It is unacceptable conduct in the workplace and is contrary to the core values of the United Nations.”

Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations

The dialogue explored how we can better work together to address, prevent and, ultimately, eradicate sexual harassment. Sexual harassment undermines the values of the UN. Ms. Martha Helena Lopez indicated: “Sexual harassment results from a culture of discrimination and privilege based on centuries of unequal gender relations and power dynamics. It is unacceptable conduct in the workplace and is contrary to the core values of the United Nations.” Similarly, as Chair of the CEB Task Force, Ms. Kelly Clements made clear, “Sexual harassment is a scourge in the workplace, which undermines the morale and the wellbeing of its staff members subjected to it”.

“We need to make sure that everybody knows how and where to report cases of wrongdoing. You need to make sure that all your policies and processes are in place.”

Ms. Yoka Brandt, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations

Tackling sexual harassment requires a proactive approach and continued attention. For example, speakers stressed that it is important to continue to prioritize efforts to address sexual harassment during the pandemic. All panellists emphasized the importance of **establishing clear procedures and policies to address sexual harassment** in every organization. As the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands stated: “We need to make sure that everybody knows how and where to report cases of wrongdoing. You need to make sure that all your policies and processes are in place.”

“It’s not enough to say that we have a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment or to put processes in place. We have to really work on the culture.”

Mr. Jonathan Allen, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

“One of the things we learned again and again is that this is a very complex issue... There’s no ‘one-stop shop’... We need to make sure that we create enough prevention and awareness for everyone to know what their rights are, how the system works and, of course, we need to have trust in the system.”

Mr. Jorge Dajani, Chief Ethics Officer, World Bank Group

Importantly, policies and procedures must be accompanied by a culture of respect and trust. Speakers expressed that **transforming organizational culture** is essential to tackling sexual harassment. As Deputy Permanent Representative Allen indicated: “It’s not enough to say that we have a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment or to put processes in place. We have to really work on culture.” Certainly, cultural change is challenging. As Deputy Executive Director Bhatia observed: “We can put in systems, we can have codes of conduct, we can send messages. The hard thing is how you change the culture of an organization.”

Similarly, Mr. Jorge Dajani indicated that there is no “one-stop shop” to end sexual harassment. One way to work towards this culture is for leadership to make clear their commitment to addressing sexual harassment. Videos of senior leaders discussing their commitment have been circulated in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UK Foreign Office. The CEB Task Force hopes to follow suit with filmed commitments of leaders throughout the UN system. Importantly, Mr. Jorge Dajani shared that the World Bank Group prioritizes consulting colleagues and creating a culture of trust for these policies, for example through implementing a code of ethics, raising awareness and hiring a specific anti-harassment coordinator.

“Rather than merely responding to the infraction or the crime, it’s very important to set an environment in which women’s leadership, participation and professionalism are respected.”

Mr. Martin Kimani, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations

To create a culture of respect, **women’s leadership and participation** throughout all levels is critical. As Permanent Representative Kimani expressed: “It’s very important to set an environment in which women’s leadership, participation and professionalism are respected.” Permanent Representative Kimani shared that the Kenyan mission undertook a gender analysis of how power and responsibility is apportioned in the workplace and emphasized that a crucial part of addressing sexual harassment is ensuring that women are in positions to make decisions. Ms. Moorehead emphasized that women’s leadership shifts the balance of power. Gender parity

goals are important to increase the representation of women. Ms. Kalpana Kochhar, Director, Human Resources Department, International Monetary Fund indicated that the last two Managing Directors of the International Monetary Fund have been women and that 35 per cent of department directors are women with an organizational goal of 50 per cent women by 2025.

“There’s a need to balance transparency and confidentiality.”

Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

“Strengthen the no retaliation policy ... it works to protect and empower staff who come forward.”

Ms. Kalpana Kochhar, Director, Human Resources Department, International Monetary Fund

Furthermore, colleagues emphasized the challenge, and importance, of improving **transparency**; policies need to be visible and communicated regularly to all colleagues. For example, Mr. Dajani shared that the World Bank implemented a communications campaign with simple infographics to ensure that colleagues understood their rights and responsibilities. Permanent Representative Brandt, Deputy Permanent Representative Allen and Ms. Kochhar recommended that organizations share with staff information about the forms of harassment and disciplinary action taken, while ensuring privacy and confidentiality of the specific people involved in the cases. As Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia asserted: “There’s a need to balance transparency and confidentiality.” Relatedly, Ms. Kalpana Kochhar emphasized the importance of strengthening protection from retaliation policies “to protect and empower staff who come forward”.

“If we move too aggressively and fail to bring the survivor along and genuinely take their concerns into account, we risk doing more harm than good. In theory, it sounds easy to put the victim or survivor first; in reality this is a much more delicate process. We are still learning how to adapt in our day-to-day work.”

Ms. Kelly T. Clements, Vice-Chair of the High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

Participants stressed the importance of adopting a **victim/survivor-centred approach**. For example, Permanent Representative Brandt raised the importance of after care and Mr. Dajani, Chief Ethics Officer at the World Bank Group discussed the significance of engaging colleagues to understand what would make them feel comfortable to report sexual harassment, and then using this feedback to adapt procedures accordingly. The Chair of the CEB Task Force expressed the need for careful implementation of this approach: “If we move too aggressively and fail to bring the survivor along and genuinely take their concerns into account, we risk doing more harm than good. In theory, it sounds easy to put the victim or survivor first; in reality this is a much more delicate process. We are still learning how to adapt in our day-to-day work.”

“We continue to lead by example, continue to share best practices and we ought to recognize colleagues ... it’s not just about the UN Secretariat when we’re back in person, it is also about how Member States act, how our delegates behave.”

Mr. Jonathan Allen, Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

The importance of the **UN leading by example** was raised by panellists. Permanent Representative Kimani emphasized that Member States should lead by example within the UN system and Permanent Representative Brandt expressed that the UN has to set an international example of ethical behaviour. Deputy Permanent Representative Allen expressed the need for Member States to practise leadership: “We continue to lead by example, continue to share best practices and we ought to recognize colleagues ... it’s not just about the UN Secretariat when we’re back in person, it is also about how Member States act, how our delegates behave.”

“What’s great about this conversation for me is that ... it’s clear we’re all wrestling with the same stuff. We all know, we’ve got to make progress on this. But you know we’re not going to do it unless we come together as an international community.”

Ms. Susanna Moorehead, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Finally, panellists expressed the importance of forums such as this dialogue to **share information and good practices**. Permanent Representative Brandt warmly welcomed the development of the Knowledge Sharing Platform by the CEB Task Force and asked that Member States be involved and have access to it. Several panellists emphasized the importance of working collaboratively within the wider international community, including with civil society through partnership agreements and other initiatives. Ms. Susanna Moorehead expressed the need to “collaborate across the international system, the bilateral, the multilateral, the embassies, the CSOs, the private sector and others”. Expressing optimism for a collaborative approach, she stated: “What’s great about this conversation for me is that ... it’s clear we’re all wrestling with the same stuff, we all know, we’ve got to make progress on this. But you know we’re not going to do it unless we come together as an international community.”



DIALOGUE TWO

Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer-to-peer learning on prevention and elimination of sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment, like sexual abuse and sexual violence, is rooted in the historic power imbalances between men and women. That is why equal rights and representation are so important within the United Nations in our own countries, regions and communities.”

– **Mr. Alie Kabba**, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and the President of the Executive Board of UN Women

When

17 March 2021

Hosts

UN Women, UN Secretariat, CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment, UN Member States Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment, Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Alie Kabba**, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations and the President of the Executive Board of UN Women
- **H.E. Mr. Gilad Erdan**, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations
- **H.E. Ms. Nathalie Estival-Broadhurst**, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Vice-Chair High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

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

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor, Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 220 participants from the international community and civil society partners in particular.

Summary

Following the success of the first dialogue, the second dialogue took place during the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Members of the international community gathered to discuss how to make zero tolerance for sexual harassment a reality.

“It remains incumbent upon us as leaders in the UN system to work towards creating more inclusive and accountable working environments free of sexual harassment where all colleagues feel respected and included, where difficult topics are openly discussed and everyone feels empowered to speak up.”

Ms. Kelly T. Clements, Vice-Chair of the High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

Leadership plays an important role in implementing zero tolerance. For example, Mr. Petersen expressed that all managers have the power and responsibility to set a clear tone and take action on sexual harassment. He advocated that all tools to tackle sexual harassment should be 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 working environments. Ms. Kelly Clements urged fellow leaders in the UN system “to work towards creating more inclusive and accountable working environments free of sexual harassment where all colleagues feel respected and included, where difficult topics are openly discussed and everyone feels empowered to speak up”. Similarly, Ms. Connors contended that “we should all act, we shouldn’t be passive bystanders. But our leaders, managers and supervisors have a special responsibility, both in prevention and providing robust support if wrongdoing occurs.”

“We realize that within the UN system and within the diplomatic community we’re not immune ... from these practices.”

Ms. Nathalie Estival-Broadhurst, Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations

Similarly, the importance of **leading by example** was raised. Deputy Permanent Representative Estival-Broadhurst indicated that the international diplomatic community is “not immune ... from these practices” which is why Israel, Kenya, the Netherlands and France established the UN Member States Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment. Deputy Permanent Representative Estival-Broadhurst shared the national efforts that France has taken to address sexual harassment, for example through the ‘Ask Angela’ programme in which victims/survivors can approach a ‘safe haven’ in public spaces and request to ‘speak to Angela’ and thus indicate they are in need of support. At a Ministry level, a dedicated unit has been put in place to prevent and address harassment through, for instance, tackling myths and setting up a hotline.

Relatedly, panellists pointed to the **need for accountability**. As an example, Assistant Secretary-General 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 in compliance with best IT practices, including those on data protection and management.

“Practising a victim-centered approach begins with respecting the inherent dignity of the victim and that includes their culture, values, views and choices and individual needs ... We need to hear the victim without judgment, without blame or discrimination and remember that different grounds of discrimination intersect.”

Ms. Jane Connors, Victims’ Rights Advocate, United Nations

Adopting a victim/survivor-centered approach is crucial. Ms. Connors noted that sexual harassment should be seen as an issue of workplace safety: “Practising a victim-centered approach begins with respecting the inherent dignity of the victim and that includes their culture, values, views and choices and individual needs.” She outlined key principles of an approach currently being developed in consultation with victims: respecting the integrity of the victim by listening without judgement; ensuring protection from retaliation and re-traumatization; re-prioritizing focus from protecting organizational reputation to ensuring victims’ rights; practising confidentiality; providing information and support to victims; and focusing on prevention.

Ms. Syed shared the common themes of her work with victims/survivors from different workplace sectors. She highlighted that by the time many women take the step to report, they have often already suffered trying to improve their situations with real costs – such as retaliation – only to be re-traumatized by inadequate reporting and investigation processes. She underscored the

importance of trauma-informed training for investigators and gaining feedback from victims/survivors to improve processes. A key part of this approach is adoption by the organization of an empathetic victim/survivor-centered approach to handling reports, as well as offering mechanisms for those who do not want to make a formal report but do want their concerns recorded.

“One common thread among nearly all of the women who use our service is that they are victims of abuses of power by men: men who are their supervisors, managers, heads of departments, or directors; men who sign their pay checks, allocate their shifts and give their performance reviews and decide who gets made redundant.”

Ms. Deeba Syed, Senior Legal Officer, Rights of Women

“It was important to adopt a very deliberate and unique approach by designing and implementing a solution-driven set of initiatives ... and identifying which pillars will be most impactful in this particular environment.”

Ms. Kemi DaSilva-Ibru, Founder and Director, Women at Risk International Foundation

Importantly, panellists pointed to the need to recognize the **root causes of sexual harassment in societies**. As Permanent Representative Alie Kabba contended: “Sexual harassment, like sexual abuse and sexual violence, is rooted in the historic power imbalances between men and women. That is why equal rights and representation are so important within the United Nations and in our own countries, regions and communities.” 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. She explained the importance of taking “a very deliberate and unique approach by designing and implementing a solution-driven set of initiatives ... and identifying which pillars will be most impactful in this particular environment.” Ms. Deeba Syed emphasized the unequal gender dynamics of sexual harassment: “One common thread is that nearly all of the women who use our service are victims of abuses of power by men.”

“This issue must be addressed from an intersectional approach. We have to give examples and experiences and case studies that directly include those ... in the margins ... those who have layered identities, so women with disabilities, women of color, black, indigenous women.”

Mr. Monroe France, Associate Vice President for Global Engagement and Inclusive Leadership, New York University

Importantly, participants brought up the need to incorporate an **understanding of intersectionality** to preventing and addressing sexual harassment. 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 a research-driven diversity and inclusion approach that understands layered identities and structures: “This issue must be addressed from an intersectional approach. We have to give examples and experiences and case studies that directly include those ... in the margins ... those who have layered identities, so women with disabilities, women of color, black, indigenous women.”

“We cannot talk about sexual harassment in isolation; instead, we have to address it holistically and provide a respectful working environment.”

Mr. Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director, UNFPA

“Today, more than ever, we must work together to build a better future with gender equality in the spirit of SDG 5 and the entire 2030 Agenda.”

Mr. Gilad Erdan, Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations

Finally, panellists expressed the need to **transform organizational culture** and create an enabling work environment. As Mr. Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund, expressed: “We cannot talk about sexual harassment in isolation; instead, we have to address it holistically and provide a respectful working environment.” Similarly, Permanent Representative Gilad Erdan pointed to the need for better working conditions and clear support structures. He stated: “People are less likely to report sexual harassment when they do not feel that they have stable employment. They don’t necessarily know who to approach when they are not in the office and do not have the support system they need.” Echoing the other panellists, he linked work to address sexual harassment in international workplaces to the broader international agenda on gender equality. He noted: “Today more than ever, we must work together to build a better future with gender equality in the spirit of SDG 5 and the entire 2030 Agenda.”

DIALOGUE THREE

Making zero tolerance a reality: Driving organizational culture change to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment really is the most extreme and most visible manifestation of gender inequity in the workplace.”

– Dr. Cleopatra Mugenyi, Director, International Center for Research on Women Africa

When

3 May 2021

Hosts

UN Women, UN Secretariat, CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Richard Arbeiter**, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations
- **Ms. Kelly T. Clements**, Vice-Chair High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Dr. Mary Ellsberg**, Executive Director and Founding Director, Global Women’s Institute, George Washington University
- **Mr. Gary Barker**, Chief Executive Officer, Promundo
- **Ms. Sudarshana Kundu**, Co-executive Director, Gender at Work
- **Ms. Fatiah Touray-Diakite**, Senior Director Inclusion and Equity, New York University Abu Dhabi
- **Dr. Cleopatra Mugenyi**, Director, International Center for Research on Women Africa

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor, Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 100 participants from the international community.

Summary

“We also know that the problem of sexual harassment will not be overcome with policy change alone. It requires us to tackle its underlying causes, such as power differentials, attitudes, values and gender norms. Changing organizational culture is therefore a priority of this Task Force. We are working from both the top and the bottom and are fully aware that change will take time.”

Ms. Kelly T. Clements, Vice-Chair High-Level Committee on Management and Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

The third dialogue explored ways to drive organizational cultural change to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is reflective of a global and organizational culture with unequal gender norms and power imbalances. Dr. Cleopatra Mugenyi, Director, ICRW Africa stated: “Sexual harassment really is the most extreme and most visible manifestation of gender inequity in the workplace.” As Deputy High Commissioner Ms. Kelly Clements made clear: “The problem of sexual harassment will not be overcome with policy change alone.” She emphasized that “it requires us to tackle its underlying causes, such as power differentials, attitudes, values and gender norms”. Regarding the UN system, she noted that “sexual harassment was a priority for us before the pandemic. It remains a high priority now and most certainly will remain a priority as we come out of this global public health crisis”. Speakers shared how to create inclusive and accountable work environments, free of sexual harassment, where all colleagues feel respected and included.

“It is important to think about ... having a clear definition of what is sexual harassment, having evidence that actually confirms the harassment and guarantees protection to victims, including dedicated mechanisms for this, as well as the importance of civil society.”

Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

“The first step was to have ClearCheck for the UN system; we are working on how we can expand it externally.”

Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations

A key issue discussed by the speakers at the outset was the importance of developing the **evidence-base of sexual harassment**. Ms. Martha Helena Lopez introduced the ClearCheck Database, an online database that enables background checks of applicants to the United Nations regarding sexual misconduct. ClearCheck is currently available for potential employees

within the UN system and will be expanded to other organizations and external partners. Ms. Martha Helena Lopez stated that “the first step was to have ClearCheck for the UN system; we are working on how we can expand it externally”.

Dr. Ellsberg noted that to measure progress, ensure accountability and prevent sexual harassment, comprehensive and comparable **definitions of sexual harassment need to be developed**. Dr. Ellsberg shared that the international community has developed good standards of measuring intimate partner violence but, in comparison, the evidence is less robust for non-partner violence, especially regarding sexual harassment. In addition, Dr. Mugenyi explained that due to the lack of literature on what works in terms of addressing sexual harassment, a good starting point would be to work with organizations on culture change and develop effective methodologies in this regard. As Deputy Executive Director Bhatia stated, it is critical to have “a clear definition of what is sexual harassment, evidence that actually confirms the harassment and guarantees protection to victims”.

“We have to think about the different vulnerabilities that people have within organizations, especially women, because of their different experiences which are shaped and can be moderated by gender, by sexual orientation, by race, by religion, by ethnicity or nationality ... [which] make them either be more powerful or less powerful within particular organizations.”

Ms. Sudarshana Kundu, Co-executive Director, Gender at Work

“Another issue that I think would be very important is addressing different economic realities and sectors and making it relevant – particularly to low and middle-income countries – so that means not just focusing on the formal sector [and] making sure that we include the great variety of individuals who are engaged in informal economic activities and agriculture.”

Dr. Mary Ellsberg, Executive Director and Founding Director, Global Women’s Institute, George Washington University

Panellists underlined the need for **organizations to apply an intersectional lens** to understand the power imbalances at the heart of the issue of sexual harassment. Ms. Touray-Diakite mentioned the influence of structures of racism and colonialism on how individuals experience sexual harassment. Ms. Touray-Diakite and Dr. Mugenyi also noted the importance of including the experiences of sexual and gender minorities, while Dr. Ellsberg discussed the realities of people from different economic backgrounds.

Dr. Ellsberg expressed the significance of “addressing different economic realities and sectors and making it relevant – particularly to low and middle-income countries – so that means not just focusing on the formal sector [and] making sure that we include the great variety of individuals who are engaged in informal economic activities and agriculture”. This was echoed

by Ms. Sudarshana Kundu who noted that “we have to think about the different vulnerabilities that people have within organizations, especially women, because of their different experiences which are shaped and can be moderated by gender, by sexual orientation, by race, by religion, by ethnicity or nationality ... [which] make them either more powerful or less powerful within particular organizations”.

“Oftentimes, we see leadership, where we put together these policies and ... statements ... things on the website. But then leadership is not always accountable or leadership is not always emulating a lot of what we talked about.”

Ms. Fatiah Touray-Diakite, Senior Director Inclusion and Equity, New York University Abu Dhabi

Ms. Kundu and Ms. Touray-Diakite highlighted the **need for feminist leadership and long-term capacity-building programmes to transform power relations in organizations**. As Ms. Kundu explained: “Feminist leadership is not just about having more women at the top, it really is about understanding the feminist principles and building that culture within your institution.” Ms. Touray-Diakite noted that there is often a disconnect between “policies and ... statements ... things on the website” versus the behavior of leadership. Ms. Kundu and Dr. Mugenyi urged the practice of feminist leadership which moves from a ‘power over’ leadership model to one of ‘power with’, ‘power within’ and ‘power to’. According to Ms. Kundu, this shift will build “an organizational culture and a decision-making process that is democratic, that is collaborative, provides psychological safety to women and everyone within it ... by doing so, it reduces abuse of power which ... is what actually causes sexual harassment.”

“Who’s responsible? Everyone’s responsible. I think you know; we are all contributors to an ecosystem. You know the workplace is an ecosystem ... you are responsible for your conduct in the workplace, and you are responsible for your interactions with one another. We are trying to ensure that everyone understands their accountabilities and that we all are accountable to one another.”

Mr. Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

Practicing good standards of conduct is the responsibility of everyone in the organization. Leadership has a particular power and responsibility to shape organizational culture and lead by example in addressing sexual harassment and creating safe working environments. An example of good leadership practice was shared by Deputy Permanent Representative Arbeiter, as Chair of the UN Peacekeeping Committee. He made clear that “everyone’s responsible” for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace ecosystem. He mentioned that there are clear expectations of conduct for delegates during negotiations, including provisions for zero tolerance of sexual harassment. As another example of accountability throughout the organization, Deputy Permanent Representative Arbeiter shared that Canada’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York City has recently required the gender pledge be signed by every employee, not only heads of mission.

“Male allyship must be at all levels. I think we still often stay at that kind of superficial discussion of male champions. ... We will invite men at the top to come in and give their blessing to a strategy and then they’ll walk out of the room and women are left actually to do the work of ending harassment and achieving equality. I think we need to make it clear, from drivers and guards and program officers and peacekeeping troops and the highest level, what male allyship looks like.”

Mr. Gary Barker, Chief Executive Officer, Promundo

Panellists stressed the importance of **engaging men in transforming the organizational culture**. Mr. Barker recommended a specific male allyship strategy. In particular, he suggested using an evidence-based approach to understand the factors preventing men from being active bystanders. To better engage men as active bystanders, he urged the creation of spaces for men to question, discuss and inform themselves about sexual harassment. He stated that “Male allyship must be at all levels” and noted that the international community can “often stay at that kind of superficial discussion of male champions”. He argued further that “we need to make it clear from drivers and guards and programme officers and peacekeeping troops and the highest level, what male allyship looks like”.

“You are not trying to engineer social transformational change: you are trying to inculcate the instincts that lead to ... a better and healthier environment where everyone can succeed.”

Mr. Richard Arbeiter, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

Lastly, the panellists discussed the **importance of communicating the benefits of transforming organizational culture to address sexual harassment**, beyond the values of human rights and equality. Mr. Barker shared the importance of “helping men see the benefits of a workplace that supports full equality”. Ms. Mugenyi highlighted the costs of sexual harassment in the workplace, especially the effect on productivity, retention of staff, team performance, damage to individuals and subsequent incidents of harassment.

Ms. Touray-Diakite observed: “We are now in a global environment where, if you do not use a diversity, equity and inclusion lens within this framework, even thinking about sexual harassment in gender equity then becomes a risk management issue.” Deputy Permanent Representative Arbeiter noted that “You are not trying to engineer social transformational change. You are trying to inculcate the instincts that lead to ... a better and healthier environment where everyone can succeed.”

DIALOGUE FOUR

Making zero tolerance a reality: Preventing and eliminating sexual harassment online

“The misogyny works online as much
as it works offline.”

– **Dr. Ranjana Kumari**, Director, Centre for Social Research, Chairperson of Women Power Connect

When

17 June 2021

Hosts

UN Women, UN Secretariat, CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment

Speakers

- **H.E. Mr. Olof Skoog**, Permanent Representative of the EU to the United Nations
- **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women
- **Ms. Martha Helena Lopez**, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations
- **Mr. Will Gardner**, CEO, Childnet International
- **Ms. Seyi Akiwowo**, CEO and Founder, Glitch
- **Dr. Ranjana Kumari**, Director, Centre for Social Research, Chairperson of Women Power Connect
- **Mr. Neil Walsh**, Chief of Cybercrime, Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Department, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- **Dr. Galina Goncharenko**, Lecturer, University of Sussex Business School, Member of the Future of Work Hub

Facilitated by **Ms. Katja Pehrman**, Senior Advisor, Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

Audience

Over 150 participants from the international community

Summary

As COVID-19 has altered the world of work, efforts towards tackling sexual harassment must adapt to our changing workplaces, in particular regarding online sexual harassment. The fourth dialogue explored how we can collaborate to address, prevent and, ultimately, eradicate online sexual harassment.

“If we approach accountability in very practical terms, we could talk about organizational accountability or liability and responsibility for the organization for the behavior of employees, not only at work, but also in online spaces. We could also talk about individual accountability of both perpetrators and bystanders.”

Dr. Galina Goncharenko, Lecturer, University of Sussex Business School, Member of the Future of Work Hub

The panellists introduced the **concept of online sexual harassment**, which Mr. Gardner defined as unwanted sexual conduct on any digital platform. Mr. Gardner outlined the various forms online sexual harassment can take: 1) non-consensual image-taking and non-consensual image-sharing; 2) sexual threats and coercion; 3) sexualized bullying; and 4) unwanted sexualization. Mr. Walsh pointed out that definitions of sexual harassment which merely refer to a pattern of behavior can have the unconscious effect of undermining people who want to report solitary incidents.

Dr. Goncharenko stressed the importance of evaluating the “workplace ecology” to effectively prevent and respond to sexual harassment. She noted that if employees feel unsafe or threatened offline, it is most likely this will translate to the online working culture. As Dr. Ranjana Kumari expressed: “The misogyny works online as much as it works offline.” It is important to eradicate the conditions that cause unequal gender dynamics to thrive both offline and online. Dr. Goncharenko explained the need to understand accountability in different ways, including “organizational accountability or liability and responsibility of the organization for the behavior of employees, not only at work, but also in online space.”

“I think the key element is that we need to make clear this is not part and parcel of using the Internet. We need to reframe people’s expectations about this.”

Mr. Will Gardner, CEO, Childnet International

One of the **main challenges to responding to sexual harassment is underreporting**. Mr. Gardner shared that underreporting stems from two key issues: the frequency of such incidents occurring and feelings of shame. In addition, both Mr. Gardner and Mr. Walsh noted that fear of retaliation is another barrier to reporting sexual harassment.

Mr. Walsh, Chief of Cybercrime, Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Department of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime noted that the UN is still coming to terms with understanding the repercussions of reporting and the implications for the safety of personnel. He stated that in the UN, “This was something, again, I don’t think as a system we were really prepared for. What is the risk to you if you’re the complainant?”. Dr. Goncharenko shared that new advancements in harassment reporting technology allow for reporting in a more confidential manner while still being efficient for thorough and prompt investigations. This was commended by Dr. Kumari who also noted the importance of maintaining a human, rather than machine-automated, perspective in reporting technology, due to the ever-changing nature of harassment. Mr. Gardner addressed the assumption that harassment is inevitable online: “I think the key element is that we need to make clear this is not part and parcel of using the Internet. We need to reframe people’s expectations about this.”

“People are not homogeneous communities, women are not homogeneous, and we need to make sure we have an intersectional framing.”

Ms. Seyi Akiwowo, CEO and Founder, Glitch

The dialogue also focused on **intersectionality**, and how online sexual harassment affects different people in different ways. Ms. Akiwowo shared that the vulnerabilities faced by women working under precarious employment conditions mean that they may choose not to report incidents of sexual harassment for fear of losing their jobs. She expressed both that “people are not homogeneous” and that “we need to make sure we have an intersectional framing”. Similarly, Dr. Kumari addressed the issue of underreporting by dissecting the impact of cultural norms on victims/survivors, and how these fuel retaliation and feelings of shame. Women, particularly in countries where sexism is pervasive, feel ashamed to come forward in their employment settings due to fear of being alienated and labeled “problematic”. Spouses and families can even demand they leave their jobs as the incident can have an adverse social effect on the family unit and not only on the victim/survivor.

“I don’t think this is by any means a simple problem to solve. It is very complex because it sits at the intersection of technology, regulation, legal frameworks, culture change, organizational ethics, and standard setting by the UN itself.”

Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

“Gender Focal Points stated that they were not aware or had no means to assess the situation [of online sexual harassment]. The result tells a story of how subtle and, perhaps, more invisible sexual harassment can be online, and therefore we need to explore effective ways to monitor and track online misconduct.”

Ms. Katja Pehrman, Senior Advisor, Focal Point for Women in the UN System, UN Women

The panel discussed the importance of developing **new pathways to address online sexual harassment**. Deputy Executive Director Bhatia discussed the challenges and need for coordination because online sexual harassment “sits at the intersection of technology, regulation, legal frameworks, culture change, organizational ethics, standard setting by the UN itself.” Since women in certain cultural contexts lack support networks to encourage them to report harassment, particularly online, Dr. Kumari emphasized the importance of peer support networks.

In a UN context, Ms. Pehrman shared findings from a survey conducted with the UN system-wide network of Gender Focal Points which revealed that this important network was unsure of how to assess and address online sexual harassment. Ms. Pehrman noted: “The result tells a story of how subtle and, perhaps, more invisible sexual harassment can be online, and therefore we need to explore effective ways to monitor and track online misconduct.”

“We needed to start looking at a public health approach to ending online abuse and understanding that our platforms need to be part of our public health space and that we should be treating issues like perpetrators and behaviors ... as a public health concern and that when people become victims and survivors of online gender-based violence, that we make sure we have a trauma-informed response to stop the cycle of violence.”

Ms. Seyi Akiwowo, CEO and Founder, Glitch

Similarly, Ms. Akiwowo’s organization, Glitch, conducted research in the UK identifying that while online abuse against women has increased 38 per cent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, only 9 per cent of respondents have received some form of training from their employers on how to stay safe online. Given this gap, both Dr. Goncharenko and Ms. Akiwowo highlighted the importance of institutions, governments and employers providing digital safety education on how to be active and responsible citizens and bystanders in online spaces.

Moreover, Ms. Akiwowo urged the recognition of online harassment as a matter of public health. She stated that “our platforms need to be part of our public health space” and suggested that “we make sure we have a trauma-informed response to stop the cycle of violence”.

Mr. Walsh called for the UN to ‘walk the talk’ by updating internal organizational policies and procedures. He stated: “If the word ‘online’ isn’t mentioned, that immediately undermines what we can do organizationally to respond to it.” Efforts to combat online sexual harassment must be integrated with efforts to address all types of harassment because it is insidious and impactful. As Deputy Executive Director Bhatia expressed: “Harassment, we know, can have lasting effects on women’s career prospects as well, and globally over a quarter of women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace and, of these, 46 per cent say that harassment actually caused them to leave their jobs or to switch careers. Therefore, eradicating sexual harassment is essential for our organizations.”

“For me, I think that starts with updating the language of our own internal guidance, because if the word ‘online’ isn’t mentioned, that immediately undermines what we can do organizationally to respond to it. And from there, we then look at that broader cultural change.”

Mr. Neil Walsh, Chief of Cybercrime, Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Department, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“We need to continue learning from others so that we can improve and continue to push in an ambitious way to achieve real results on this agenda.”

– **Ms. Anita Bhatia**, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women

Workstream 4 on Outreach and Knowledge Sharing of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment conducted four peer-to-peer learning dialogues during which good practices and recommendations were shared on how the UN can work collaboratively and enhance accountability to address, prevent and ultimately eliminate sexual harassment. These dialogues were initiated under the leadership of Ms. Anita Bhatia, Deputy Executive Director, Assistant Secretary-General, Resource Management, UN System Coordination, Sustainability and Partnerships, UN Women and Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources, Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance at the United Nations. The dialogues reached over 600 participants and fostered the exchange of good practices and the sharing of collective knowledge from the international community. UN Women, the UN Secretariat and the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment extends its thanks to all those who participated in these events.

As discussed in more detail in the sections on Key Messages and Recommendations, the following twelve recommendations to the UN system emerged from the peer-to-peer dialogues:



Build and safeguard an inclusive working environment to prevent sexual harassment



Demonstrate leadership commitment to eradicate sexual harassment



Adopt a victim/survivor-centred approach



Implement existing policies and tools



Provide clear and regular guidance



Strengthen efforts to reach gender balance



Address intersectionality



Strengthen accountability



Engage men



Provide training and organizational learning



Share and showcase good practice and collaboration



Address online sexual harassment

Different sections of the international community can work together and learn from each other through existing good practices. The peer-to-peer dialogues identified the value in continued exchange of innovative approaches that can be taken to scale and regularly updated to respond to new forms and new spaces of sexual harassment across workspaces in the UN and beyond. As Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia stated: “We need to continue learning from others so that we can improve and continue to push, in an ambitious way, to achieve real results on this agenda. The work is far from over. It is incumbent on us all to prevent, address and, ultimately, eradicate sexual harassment.”



APPENDIX 1: RESOURCES

CEB TASK FORCE RESOURCES

[Code of Conduct](#) For UN system Events

UN system [Model Policy](#)

Information about the [ClearCheck](#) Database

[Guide for managers](#) to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace

[Sexual Harassment Task Force - Facilitators' Guide](#)

[CEB Statement on Addressing Sexual Harassment Within the Organizations Of The UN System, 2018](#)

UN SECRETARIAT RESOURCES

[United to Respect Toolkit](#)

UN WOMEN RESOURCES

[Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) for the UN System

[Make parity a reality: Field-specific enabling environment guidelines](#)

[How to address online sexual harassment during COVID-19](#)

UN Women [publications](#) on addressing sexual harassment

Publication: [What will it take? Promoting cultural change to end sexual harassment](#)

Publication: [Stepping up to the challenge: Towards international standards on training to end sexual harassment](#)

Publication: [Bridging the gap: Sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment \(SEAH\)](#)

[Webinar series on sexual harassment](#)

[Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces](#)

[Spotlight Initiative](#)

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Columbia Law School. 2017. Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality, [More than Two Decades Later](#).

Glitch UK and End Violence Against Women Coalition, [The Ripple Effect: COVID-19 and the Epidemic of Online Abuse](#).

