

**Peer-to-peer dialogue**

Making Zero Tolerance a Reality

Enhancing collaboration across the UN to foster organizational culture change and address sexual harassment

**17 February 2023****9:00 – 10:20am (EST)**

Event Report Summary

Background

Creating inclusive and accountable working environments where all colleagues feel safe, respected, and included is essential to prevent and address sexual harassment. The United Nations has developed guidelines and tools to tackle sexual harassment, including [the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment](#), [the UN System Code of Conduct](#) and [A Common Understanding of a Victim-centred Approach to Addressing Sexual Harassment](#), and the implementation of these resources is key to transforming organizational culture.

The CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment together with UN Women has organized peer-to-peer learning dialogues since 2021 to engage with the international community to jointly address and eliminate sexual harassment. On 17 February, the CEB Task Force, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) and UN Women hosted the eighth of these online dialogues. The event explored how collaboration can be enhanced across the United Nations system to create an enabling environment, and address, prevent and, ultimately, eradicate sexual harassment.

The event adhered to the Code of Conduct to prevent harassment, including sexual harassment, at UN System Events.

Welcome

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

Ms. Pehrman welcomed the distinguished speakers and over 150 participants to the eighth peer-to-peer learning dialogue, bringing together the UN family and the international community to eliminate sexual harassment. Ms. Pehrman outlined the three-fold purposes of the event:

- Inform UN Member States, the UN entities, civil society representatives and other stakeholders about efforts to address and prevent sexual harassment within the UN system;
- Identify good practices and efforts being undertaken to foster culture change and enhance collaboration in tackling sexual harassment by the UN, Member States and the private sector;
- Deepen the dialogue on continued joint efforts to prevent sexual harassment across the UN system and beyond.

The Focal Point for Women in the UN System represents a system-wide network of over 450 UN Gender Focal Points in the CEB Task Force. UN Gender Focal Points support their leadership and UN organizations to implement the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. They

promote diverse, inclusive, and respectful working environments, which includes implementing the organization's tools and policies to prevent sexual harassment. As many Focal Points work in the field, they are essential agents of change in making zero tolerance a reality in the UN system around the world.

Opening Remarks

H.E. Mr. Gianluca Greco, Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations

Ambassador Greco underlined that sexual harassment goes against the UN's fundamental values. He emphasized that UN must lead by example in achieving SDG 5 on women's empowerment and gender equality. As a demonstration of Italy's dedication to tackling sexual harassment, the Ambassador referred to a recent financial contribution of USD 2.5 million to the UN Trust Fund, aimed at eradicating violence against women. He highlighted the importance of cooperation across the UN system, including among Member States, donors and implementing partners to eradicate all forms of harassment and violence.

Overview of the work of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment

Ms. Kelly T. Clements, Chair of the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

Ms. Clements presented an overview of the work of the Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System. As mentioned by Ms. Clements, the Task Force has produced [important policies and tools](#), however the policies alone are not sufficient to create safe and inclusive working environments. She stressed the need for a cultural shift built on trust, transparency, and accountability, where colleagues feel empowered to speak up and report sexual misconduct. The Task Force has prioritized putting victims/survivors at the center of its efforts and has developed training materials and shared best practices to strengthen cooperation to prevent sexual harassment. Ms. Clements thanked the committed members of the Task Force and emphasized the need for continued support to bring about the necessary cultural change.

Peer-to-peer learning dialogue

Ms. Anita Bhatia, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women co-leads the CEB Task Force's work on Enhanced Cooperation with OCHA. She thanked attendees for joining the discussion on how to enhance collaboration across the UN to foster organizational culture change and tackle sexual harassment.

UN Women is committed to preventing and eradicating sexual harassment in the UN system and has been an integral part of the CEB Task Force since its creation in 2017. Her workstream's objective is to engage key actors to strengthen approaches to address sexual harassment. Through their eight dialogues since 2021, UN Member States, civil society representatives, academia, private sector and leadership from UN organizations have shared good practices and recommendations on how to work collaboratively to enhance accountability in addressing and preventing sexual harassment.

She reminded colleagues that the UN has compiled lessons from the peer-to-peer learnings in the dialogues held since 2020 into a **publication**, [Making zero tolerance a reality: Peer-to-peer learning to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the UN system and beyond](#), which provides a comprehensive overview of the discussions and experiences from the international community working to address sexual harassment. Another publication covering the subsequent dialogues will be released soon.

Both Ms. Clements and Ms. Bhatia shared that UN Women will launch the UN System-wide **Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment** in the coming months, which will be a One-Stop-Shop for best practices and information on addressing sexual harassment that is publicly available. Ms. Bhatia referred to the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#), its [Supplementary Guidance](#) and the [Field-Specific Enabling Guidelines](#) in support of the Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, created by UN Women. They offer practical recommendations and good practice examples on how to foster an inclusive and safe working environment, free from sexual harassment.

DED Bhatia moderated the following panel:

- **Ms. Unaisi Lutu Vuniwaqa**, Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security, United Nations Department for Safety and Security
- **Mr. Michael Nieset**, Partner, Heidrick & Struggles
- **Ms. Dyane Epstein**, Senior Coordinator, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, International Organization for Migration
- **Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham**, Director, Coordination Division, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **Mr. Simon Springett**, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Moldova

The panel emphasized that an important way to foster culture change is to **increase women's representation and achieve gender parity**, not just generally but specifically in leadership positions. Ms. Vuniwaqa explained that to increase the number of women in the UN peacekeeping, the UN engages with Member States to **increase the number of women in their police departments and military forces**. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) also organizes quarterly meetings to address issues related to sexual harassment, exploitation, and other misconduct, and reminds its workforce of the important role they play through bystander training and regular forums. The goal is to champion the right behavior and make changes in the workforce to address the issues. Mr. Rajasingham emphasized that addressing sexual harassment requires a concerted approach to **transform a range of power imbalances**, including racism.

Fostering understanding of the organizational, rather than individual, nature of sexual harassment is crucial. To demonstrate this point, Ms. Epstein shared a poem that was developed by IOM emphasizing that the problem is a shared responsibility. Ms. Epstein also mentioned that an upcoming communications campaign will be linked to behavior change and its impact will be measured through a baseline survey. Mr. Nieset also emphasized the importance of **engaging men** and men modelling behavior.

STRATEGIC IDEA

Sexual harassment is happening in our organization.
It is hurting the wellbeing of our people.
You might think this problem is caused by just a few people.
But it is actually caused by all of us.

We might not have suffered it. We might not have committed it.
But at some point, we have all witnessed it.

And usually, we say nothing.
We believe it's a problem for the individuals affected.
Or worse, we don't even recognize it as a problem.

In allowing sexual harassment to go unchallenged,
we enable a culture where it can thrive.
Our inaction tells the perpetrator their actions are ok.
Our inaction tells the affected individual 'this is normal'.

This must change.
And to change it, we must first learn how to recognise it. So we all know
what is and isn't ok.
We must also equip all those who want to act with the know-how and
permission to do so.
So we can have better conversations with each other.

It takes all of us to stop sexual harassment.
But it's time we learned *how* to do it.
It's time to...

Be an upstander not a bystander.

Source: International Organization for Migration

Echoing the importance of **awareness-raising and transparent communication through multiple channels**, Mr. Springett shared that the UN Country Team in Moldova has focused on building awareness and trust within the team to create safe spaces to have conversations about sexual harassment. The team has created different communication tools translated into different languages and driven through the UN communication groups to create continuous awareness. A legal expert was hired to review the national legislation, public services and referral pathways, and a small joint trust fund was created to ensure that a legal assistance to victims of harassment can be initiated. Mr. Springett and Ms. Epstein clarified that zero complaints does not mean that no incidents occur but rather that organizations need to understand why people do not report.

Explicitly integrating sexual harassment in other strategies is key to foster culture change and create safe working environments. Both Mr. Springett and Mr. Rajasingham discussed the importance of linking preventative work of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. In Moldova, Mr. Springett explained that the UNCT has taken an intentional approach to include sexual harassment in their protection from sexual exploitation and abuse annual work planning as a stand-alone component. This was done to identify risks and opportunities for sexual harassment prevention, increase the level of understanding of staff and partners, and to push forward global best practice into some response mechanisms.

Mr. Rajasingham explained that the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) strategy on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\)](#) aims to shift from zero cases of sexual misconduct towards cultural organizational changes, and that the IASC will be responsible for promoting lasting change in organizational culture, behavior, and attitudes towards all forms of sexual misconduct. Additionally, he highlighted the **importance of partnerships and collaboration to foster a culture of**

respect for diversity and human rights. The IASC and its core partners will organize interactive sessions on incentivizing, measuring, researching, and partnering for culture change at the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in April 2023.

Accountability is also essential to prevent and end sexual harassment. Representing Heidrick & Struggles and the private sector more generally, Mr. Nieset shared his personal experiences in gender inequality, advocating for diversity, equality, and women's rights in the workplace. He highlighted the phases of corporate America as it relates to sexual harassment in the workplace and how the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) from 2002 impacted the accountability for corporate board directors, and how the last ten years have seen a significant growth in the percentage of women board directors on corporate boards.

He emphasized the importance of leadership to implement policies. Examples of actions include implementing an annual code of conduct and fostering an environment where there are “no exceptions for bad behaviors” for anyone at any level in the organization to demonstrate that there is truly a zero-tolerance approach.

At the end of the meeting, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Elimination of Sexual Harassment, Ms. Avital Rosenberg (Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations) thanked UN Women and the CEB Task Force for addressing the issue of sexual harassment. She appreciated the peer-to-peer dialogue and highlighted the importance of exploring new topics such as technology-facilitated sexual harassment and cyberbullying. She encouraged Member States and UN entities to emphasize the need to address and eliminate these phenomena. She also thanked the President of the General Assembly for making the [online course on preventing sexual harassment](#) available to all Permanent Missions as well as UN staff.

Closing remarks

Ms. Anita Bhatia, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UN Women

Ms. Bhatia thanked Ms. Avital Rosenberg for her statement on the importance of incorporating the issue of sexual harassment into intergovernmental processes, particularly in the context of the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women that focuses on digital technology and innovation. She emphasized the need to address both the opportunities and challenges arising from digital technology, particularly with a regard to online harassment and cyberbullying. She highlighted the need to shape mindsets and behaviors to promote gender equality, particularly in light of the [recent global survey results](#) showing a negative change in attitudes towards women in leadership roles. She expressed gratitude to the speakers and members of the audience.