

ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment 2016

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): Translating Articulated Commitments into Concrete Action for Preventing and Addressing SEA

International Organization for Migration and InterAction

Monday, 27 June, 08:30 – 09:45
Conference Room 1, United Nations Secretariat, New York

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, in keeping with this year's theme: *Restoring Humanity and Leaving No One Behind: Working together to reduce people's humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability.*

Background and objectives

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by humanitarian workers and any other actors sent to protect the most vulnerable populations directly contradicts the principles upon which humanitarian action is based, and represents a protection failure by the international community. SEA inflicts indelible harm on the very people seeking protection from armed conflict and natural disasters and who the humanitarian community is obligated to protect. As reports of abuses committed by aid workers have continued, the humanitarian community has been actively engaged in developing means of prevention and action to eradicate these heinous acts. This event will contribute to Member States' understanding of existing commitments and actions taken by humanitarian response agencies to actively combat SEA, strengthen responses internally and collectively, and further systematize preventing sexual exploitation and abuse within emergency response operations and the humanitarian architecture.

In line with the 2016 ECOSOC HAS Theme, protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) is a collective action that the entire international community can operationalize to reduce SEA risk and vulnerability in the populations we serve. This Side Event will discuss how, by introducing concrete actions that can be taken to prevent and respond to SEA. Following up on the PSEA Side Event at the World Humanitarian Summit, the panel will discuss leadership roles, in line with the 2015 IASC Statement on PSEA which seated the issue within the responsibilities of the Humanitarian Coordinators. It will address the need to coordinate UN and IASC procedures and actions so that PSEA responses benefit from coordination and avoid fragmentation, particularly noting the unique role of the IASC as key coordination forum for NGOs, IOs, and UN agencies engaged in emergency response. Noting that even one case of SEA destroys the trust of affected communities and jeopardizes an entire humanitarian operation, the event will note the role of all entities - states, donors, UN, IOs and NGOs – in effecting institutional change to that can build toward coherent collective response. Finally, the event will identify continuing challenges in the fight against SEA and introduce solutions, including recently-developed tools to assist the humanitarian community in actualizing PSEA commitments, as well as the conceptualization of SEA as a violation of international human rights law and its attendant protections.

At this time when international commitment to prevent and respond to SEA is at an all-time high and immediately following the PSEA discussion at the WHS, the ECOSOC HAS is the ideal forum to capitalize on the momentum to turn commitment into concrete action that will

eradicate this blight on humanitarian assistance provision. Riding on current momentum, this event will seek to elicit commitments from Member States to support humanitarian agencies to strengthen their individual and collective responses to effectively prevent and respond to instances of sexual abuse and exploitation. It will take concerted efforts on all our parts to translate PSEA commitments into real change, and to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place in *all* emergency response operations.

Discussion points: Against this backdrop, the side-event will focus on the following suggested questions:

- 1. Leadership roles and the coordination of responses among the humanitarian community
- 2. PSEA progress that has been made, challenges that still exist, and solutions to combat those challenges
- 3. Specific commitments that different sectors of the international community can take to strengthen prevention and response to SEA

Intended outcomes/conclusions/recommendations

This side event will enable Member States and relevant stakeholders in the humanitarian community to discuss strategies for ensuring that international commitments on PSEA are translated into concrete actions and plans for consistent practice. The 2016 HAS is one of few opportunities to not only bring Member States and humanitarian actors together around the topic of PSEA, but also to do so in the time immediately following the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) during which PSEA was addressed as a “shared responsibility to restore humanity.” Building on WHS discussions, participants can further analyze during the HAS how current SEA challenges and PSEA commitments are affecting the roles and responsibilities of international and humanitarian actors, identify necessary coordination and resource requirements, and decide next steps in light of best practices and lessons learned. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has developed critical tools and research on PSEA, and the dissemination of existing tools and guidance – both procedural and operational – can be essential in eliminating the scourge of SEA. This side event will bring integral stakeholders together for a frank, forward-moving discussion on what PSEA policies and procedures to implement, and how. The side event will seek to elicit commitments from Member States to support humanitarian agencies to strengthen their individual and collective responses to effectively prevent and respond to instances of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Format Panel discussion, with time for interactive Q&A

Moderator:

- Patricia McIlreavy, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction

Panel composition:

- IOM representative
- U.S. Government representative (TBC)
- Canadian Government representative (TBC)
- OHCHR representative (TBC)
- InterAction member agency representative
- ECHO representative (TBC)

Background Material

- Screenshot of the [SEA allegation database](#) (for tracking complaints received and victim assistance provided)
- The Best Practice Guide on Inter-agency Community-based Complaint Mechanisms (CBCMs) (publication forthcoming)
- The Standard Operating Procedures for inter-agency cooperation in CBCMs and SEA allegation referrals (publication forthcoming)

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