



OCHA United Nations Office
for the Coordination of
Humanitarian Affairs



Department
for International
Development

Concept Note

Safe and Respected: Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment in the Humanitarian Sector

26 September 2018

**8:00 – 9:30 am, Conference Room 11, UN Headquarters
New York**

Background

In 2017, the United Nations Secretary-General launched his report on *Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse: A new approach*, setting out a new strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. Since the launch of the report, progress has been made across the United Nations system and the humanitarian sector, with the engagement of a wide range of actors – including Member States and non-governmental and multilateral organizations. There is a recognition that no single organization can effectively address these issues alone and that cooperation is required across different sectors. On 31 May 2018, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals met in New York and focused on how to strengthen approaches to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment and abuse against aid workers (SHA). IASC Principals committed to a vision of a humanitarian eco-system in which people caught up in crises feel safe and respected and can access the assistance they need without fear of exploitation, abuse or harassment by any aid worker. They agreed, as leaders, to role model values and behaviours to promote a culture in which sexual harassment, bullying, and any abuse of authority is never acceptable across the humanitarian sector. They agreed to create working environments in which staff feel supported, respected and empowered to deliver the help that people caught up in crises want and need. They also reiterated their zero-tolerance policy towards SEA and SHA and agreed on the need to take concrete steps to strengthen collective systems, processes and capacities to make this vision a reality for the humanitarian community. IASC Principals recognized that SEA and SHA are a symptom of power imbalances which have allowed a culture of impunity to take root in some places. Over the past year, individual efforts have been bolstered and there has been widespread recognition of the important collective efforts. Actions are being taken to address the root causes of SEA and SHA. New mechanisms have been or are being put in place to protect survivors and enforce internal justice mechanisms. Mechanisms for investigation, reporting, screening and sharing information have been or are being put in place to prevent transgressors from moving across organizations; mandatory training has been enforced.

Issues and Significance

Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse is critical to the accountable delivery of aid to people in need, but also to the integrity of humanitarian organizations and workers and the upholding of humanitarian principles.

This high-level event is expected to provide an overview of the progress made across the system on commitments made by IASC Principals, identify planned activities and establish areas in

which further action is required. The event will concentrate on efforts and achievements made by humanitarian partners around:

1. Ensuring a victim-centered approach to addressing SEA and SHA;
2. Promoting positive change in organizational culture through strategic communications and role modeling;
3. Improving referencing systems to stop transgressors from moving through the humanitarian sector;
4. Strengthening sector-wide investigations capacity;
5. Supporting collective activities of in-country networks to SEA and SHA.

The discussion will also drive momentum and increase support for joint efforts, in advance of an international summit in London on 18 October, hosted by the UK International Development Secretary. The summit seeks to drive collective action to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the aid sector. The summit will look to secure a set of commitments towards strategic shifts, such as:

- i) Support survivors and victims, enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen reporting and tackle impunity
- ii) Incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.
- iii) Agree minimum standards and ensure we and our partners meet them.
- iv) Strengthen organisational capacity and capability across the international aid sector, including building the capability of implementing partners to meet the minimum standards.

Outcomes and Format

This 90-minute event is for the Member States, UN agencies, multilateral organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to share good practices and highlight their contributions in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, to increase support for joint efforts in this area and highlight tangible actions that will be taken in the future.

Envisioned Program

The event is co-hosted by OCHA and the United Kingdom and planned in collaboration with UN Secretariat entities engaged in various work streams around the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and IASC members. In line with the International Gender Champions Panel Parity Pledge, the panel will be gender balanced. Geographic representation, as that of the UN, should also be reflected. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator will moderate the event. Panelists include:

- Ms. Jan Beagle, USG for Management and Chair, Chief Executives Board Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System
- Ms. Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International and member of Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response;
- Ms. Jane Connors, Victims' Rights Advocate for the United Nations;
- Ms. Henrietta Fore, IASC Champion for SEA and SHA - Executive Director of UNICEF;
- Mr. Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- Mr. William Lacy Swing, Director-General of IOM

The United Kingdom's Secretary of State for International Development, Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, will make closing remarks.