

**Protection from Sexual Exploitation & Abuse: Summary of side events at the World Humanitarian Summit and the United Nations Economic and Social Council Humanitarian Affairs Segment**

Sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers and peacekeepers undermines the integrity of humanitarian work, inflicting significant harm on people when they are at their most vulnerable. Eradicating such acts represents a critical element of our accountability to affected people. Failure to address the issue quickly and decisively erodes the trust of the communities we serve. In recent years, the humanitarian community has taken positive steps to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse, yet further action is still needed to transform policy into practice.

Now is the time for all humanitarian actors to take a principled stance, act with moral courage and demonstrate zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse. During 2016, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and InterAction co-organized side events at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and the United Nations Economic and Social Council Humanitarian Affairs Segment (ECOSOC HAS). The events were designed to explore current challenges and highlight the collective steps necessary to ensure effective prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

This summary report captures the key discussions, conclusions and recommendations, and will be used to help inform next steps in combatting sexual exploitation and abuse, both by individual organizations and collectively across the entire humanitarian system.

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**Date:** Monday 23 May 2016

**Session Title:** Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Shared Responsibility to Restore Humanity

**Event Details:** The first World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) brought together 9000 participants from Member States, the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organizations to discuss the pressing challenges that are resulting in so much suffering today. Further details regarding the event can be found at: <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/>

**Objective:** Explore current challenges relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and highlight the collective steps necessary to ensure effective prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

**Panel Members:**

- Peggy Hicks, Director of Research and Right to Development Division, OHCHR (Moderator)
- Ambassador William Lacy Swing, Director General of IOM /IASC Champion on PSEA
- Henrike Trautmann, Head of the Specific Thematic Policies unit, Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), European Commission
- Catherine Weisner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, U.S. Government
- Karina Gould, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Government of Canada
- Patricia McIlreavy, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, InterAction

**Discussion:**

The opening remarks emphasized that protecting people from sexual exploitation and abuse is a core aspect of safeguarding humanity, therefore the responsibility of all humanitarian actors. This event was designed as an opportunity to make collective commitments on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), in order to further strengthen the collective response.

The discussion began by highlighting three key areas central to eradicating sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA): change, challenges and counsel.



Firstly, we must move from institutional commitments to behavioural change, by transforming attitudes and ensuring that punishment follows proven violations, and find ways to monitor the extent to which this is occurring. There must be a more systematic and cohesive response within emergency operations, especially in conflict situations where there is particular vulnerability. Secondly, addressing the remaining challenges in eradicating sexual exploitation and abuse requires consistent and senior leadership, while also ensuring open dialogue with national organizations. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals Statement endorsed in December 2015 affirms the commitment of the IASC Principals to actively prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers, and the role of the PSEA Senior Focal Points, Humanitarian Coordinators (HC), and the Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) to implement this commitment in all humanitarian response operations. The biannual meeting of PSEA Senior Focal Points offers a valuable opportunity to share good practice and identify barriers, therefore it is essential that high-level participation is maintained. While the Principals' Statement provides clarity regarding the responsibilities of HCs, it will be essential to follow up on how this is being implemented in practice and identify where gaps remain. Furthermore, although the Statement represents a positive step, awareness still lags and the Statement must reach a broader audience of humanitarian actors so they can hold one another accountable in their responsibilities relating to PSEA. Finally, guidance and tools must be available to support humanitarian actors in their efforts to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse. Three such tools will be launched in coming weeks: the Community Based Complaints Mechanism Best Practice Guide, Global Standard Operation Procedures on PSEA, and an online common reporting platform.

The panel members agreed that putting survivors and affected communities at the centre of prevention and response was key to eradicating sexual violence and abuse, which includes living up to responsibilities to victims and ensuring an adequate victim compensation policy. Local actors have a key role to play in working with affected communities to put in place the prevention measures most appropriate to each context, therefore capacity building amongst local actors requires significantly more attention. The theme of localization featured heavily within the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity, published ahead of the Summit, and when working with national organizations PSEA must be part of conversation. Furthermore, new tools such as those relating to community-based complaints mechanisms are a key part of developing more active conversations with beneficiaries.

Initiatives implemented by organizations to date, such as staff training, dedicated PSEA staff, staff assessments, and cross-department working groups all represent progress, but the panel agreed that we must go further. Commitments, policies and codes of conduct are not effective unless implemented on ground. Pre-deployment training isn't enough without engagement on the ground. Short term employment of staff (including national and refugee staff) is no longer an excuse, especially as such staff are frequently on long term contracts. Organizations must be willing to initiate frank, open and difficult conversations with staff at field level, so they are actively seeking to identify the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse before it occurs.



Panel members emphasized the need for better inter-agency coordination and integrated response, based on an atmosphere of trust. It should be possible to have an open dialogue without fear of the truth. Information should be shared more transparently based on commitment to affected populations, rather than fearing how such information may be held against the organization. New tools offer the prospect of better data quality, but only if all actors are committed to sharing information. We must safeguard, but also ensure safeguards don't create barriers for accountability.

The discussion emphasized the key role that donors have to play in eliminating sexual exploitation and abuse. One donor pre-screens partners to ensure compliance with IASC standards, which is one of ten criteria that must be met before receiving funding requests. Potential recipients of funding must also show how PSEA is being mainstreamed into humanitarian programming. Another donor requires submission of implementation plans with details of how they will implement the six PSEA Minimum Operating Standards. Donors are also committed to training staff in how to monitor compliance via the proposal process and visits to the field.



The panel members representing donor organizations all indicated that they are keen to discuss what else donors can do to encourage progress. They are also keen to engage in dialogue about the need for multi-year strategic funding to address sexual exploitation and abuse.

With regard to peacekeeping troops, several panel members highlighted the lack of commitment amongst troop-contributing countries to take disciplinary action, given that we are yet to see successful prosecutions for most cases. One panel member argued that it was time to raise the stakes, so that troop contributing countries feel real consequences of failing to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse. The panel acknowledged that to do this, there needs to be the option to backfill peacekeeping troops returned home, which in turn requires more states to be willing to contribute troops to peacekeeping operations. Overall, there needs to be incentives for strong preventive and responsive action, including praise for states that take action, as well as speaking up on the global stage. At the same time, formal training in prevention of sexual violence in conflict must be included within the core curriculum for all personnel deploying on peacekeeping operations. Finally, the panel highlighted the need to work in partnership to ensure more women are involved in peacekeeping and related activities. Women are frequently the victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, however they must also be empowered as agents of change.

The panel agreed that it is important to understand where progress is being made and where gaps remain, therefore periodic reviews are needed to assess the degree to which the Principles Statement on PSEA, and other measures, have led to changes in behaviour. We must put in place indicators for success and transparently report against them, while speaking out against violations when they do occur. Furthermore, we must ensure feedback is provided to the survivors, community, host government and donors to avoid any sense of impunity. Meanwhile, sustained media attention, political will and leadership is needed to keep the issue in spotlight.

#### **Conclusions and recommendations:**

The panel agreed that sexual exploitation and abuse by those engaged in humanitarian action is a contradiction of the principles upon which humanitarian action is based, and violates the trust that is the foundation of our service. As humanitarians we should be helping people, rather than hurting people, and must continually challenge the excuses for why we are not succeeding. There was agreement that many of the themes raised here warrant further discussion and action. The most immediate next step is to ensure discussion of PSEA is included within the upcoming ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, and included within the Resolution following the event.



**Date:** Monday 27 June 2016

**Session Title:** Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA):  
Translating Articulated Commitments into Concrete Action for  
Preventing and Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

**Event Details:** ECOSOC's Humanitarian Affairs Segment (ECOSOC HAS) is a unique platform that brings together UN Member States, UN organizations, humanitarian and development partners, the private sector and affected communities. Each June, they discuss and agree on how to best tackle the most recent and pressing humanitarian concerns. Interactive panel discussions and side events share the latest information on current opportunities and challenges. Further details regarding the event can be found at: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/events/2016-0>

**Objective:**

This event will contribute to Member States' understanding of existing commitments and actions taken by humanitarian response agencies to actively combat sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), strengthen responses internally and collectively, and further systematize the prevention of SEA within emergency response operations and the humanitarian architecture.

**Panel Members:**

Ms. Tristan Burnett, PSEA Global Project Coordinator, IOM (Moderator)

Mr. Luc Ferran, Director – Ethics and Compliance Unit, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Ms. Monique Pariat, Director-General, DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, ECHO

Ms. Catherine Wiesner, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, United States

Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR

Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (ASG/DERC), OCHA

Mr. Mohammed Abdiker, Director – Department of Operations and Emergencies, IOM



## Discussion:

The opening remarks emphasized that it is the responsibility of all humanitarian actors to actively protect members of affected populations from being subjected to abuse by those charged to assist and protect them. Following on from a similar event at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, this discussion was designed as an opportunity to advance institutional commitments on PSEA and to further strengthen the collective response.

The discussion began in the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Principals' Statement on PSEA that was issued in December 2015. This statement affirms the commitment of the IASC Principals to actively prevent and respond to SEA by humanitarian workers, and the role of PSEA Senior Focal Points, Humanitarian Coordinators (HC), and the Humanitarian Country Teams (HCT) to implement this commitment in all humanitarian response operations. The IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance, involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. As the primary coordination forum for humanitarian actors, the IASC is well-positioned to ensure a system-wide PSEA response that also reaches the field. The panel noted that to help without hurting is the most basic responsibility, therefore although PSEA is not a topic that people necessarily want to talk about, it is more important than ever to hold a mirror to ourselves and ensure PSEA remains high on the collective agenda. The fostering of a collective culture of accountability requires both strong leadership and consistent resource allocation. The panel agreed that the leadership of the HCs and HCTs, as reflected in the 2015 Principals Statement, represents an extremely positive step in ensuring country-level leadership on preventing and responding to SEA. It will, however, be important to continually monitor the effectiveness with which the Principals' Statement is being transformed into practice.

The discussion also highlighted an IASC pilot project that took place during 2015, focused on the establishment of community-based complaints mechanisms (CBCM) in two humanitarian settings. Participants in Ethiopia and DRC received comprehensive training in how to set up an inter-agency system and beneficiaries received extensive information on how to access the mechanism. The lessons learned during these pilot projects were used to develop *Global Standard Operating Procedures* and a *Best Practices Guide* that will enable CBCMs to be replicated in other humanitarian settings. These documents will be formally rolled out in coming months and all of the panellists acknowledged the leadership of IOM, the contributions of a range of wider actors, and the donor support, that have all been instrumental in the success of this project to date.



Panel members went on to highlight the many examples of good practice relating to PSEA that can already be seen across the humanitarian system. These include training programmes, the establishment of a network of PSEA focal points to provide peer support, and the development of longer-term corporate PSEA strategies. The discussions also highlighted that while many preventative measures are now widely applied, they must go further if SEA is to be permanently eradicated. For example, training should be translated into different languages and adapted to meet the specific needs at different levels within agencies. Initial PSEA training should be followed up with regular refresher training and group training to enable operational teams to identify how they can actively prevent SEA. Panellists agreed that it is not acceptable to wait until an allegation is received before testing whether policies and procedures are sufficiently comprehensive and widely understood. Instead, agencies should be preparing collectively, so they can act swiftly when

allegations are received. Furthermore, investigations into allegations of SEA can present very specific challenges that may not be present with investigations into other forms of staff misconduct. It is therefore imperative that agencies have the necessary capacity in place, including the ability to maintain an appropriate level of separation between investigators and those being investigated.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of paying attention to building the capacity of local responders and national organizations in preventing and responding to SEA, especially given their close proximity to affected populations. There was agreement that this demands more than the provision of basic training packages, and instead extends to the creation of an atmosphere of trust amongst implementation partners, where the root causes of SEA can be addressed collectively rather than concealed. Such an approach will likely incorporate a wide range of measures, including working together towards collective outcomes and establishing joint approaches to CBCM and investigations.

Several members of the panel noted the important role that donors have to play both in terms of their own standards relating to PSEA and the standards expected of their partners. This goes further than just requiring a PSEA Code of Conduct to be in place, and also includes regular training for donor staff so they can review proposals effectively and pose questions to partners in the field regarding the extent to which standards are being adhered to in practice. There is also a need to identify additional funding for PSEA prevention and response systems, including coordination and activities to raise awareness, in order to ensure that the momentum on this critical issue is maintained.

The discussion concluded by highlighting some outstanding barriers to eradicating SEA, along with some potential solutions that should form the basis of future efforts. Firstly, the importance of including affected populations in discussions on how to prevent and respond to SEA within their communities was emphasized. Secondly, there was agreement that all agencies should proactively assess the specific vulnerabilities to SEA within their programming, and take steps to mitigate these risks accordingly. Thirdly, cultural perceptions and the possibility of retaliation can make it difficult for staff and beneficiaries to report suspected cases of SEA. Therefore panellists agreed it is essential to ensure adequate 'whistleblowing' protections are in place, as well as to ensure system to receive and process anonymous complaints. One panellist also noted that technology offers opportunities to address these challenges, for example in providing anonymity for those making allegations. The panellists agreed that all humanitarian actors must remain committed to seeking and applying innovative solutions in improving prevention and response to SEA. Fourthly, the need for robust, system-wide vetting mechanisms was highlighted, with view to preventing the re-recruitment of offenders once an allegation had been proven. Finally, a session participant raised the issue of increasing the proportion of female personnel within peacekeeping deployments, and there was agreement amongst the panel that this should be explored further.

### **Conclusions and recommendations:**

The Moderator thanked Member States for including PSEA language within the ECOSOC resolution, noting that it is hoped this represents the start of an ongoing and productive collaboration to end SEA. Panel members agreed that the system must remain committed to building a more inclusive and coordinated approach to combatting PSEA, enabling NGOs and UN agencies to work closely together in addressing root causes of SEA.

