

Remarks by Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, on the implementation of recommendations in the independent victim-centred review of UN Women policies and processes on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment at the UN Women Executive Board

Wednesday, 23 June 2021

I would sincerely like to thank all Member States for their continuous support and engagement with UN Women in our efforts to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) as well as sexual harassment (SH).

UN Women is deeply committed to providing a safe, inclusive and respectful work environment, while having the highest standard of policies and processes in place to ensure the effective prevention and response to SEA and SH, using a victim-centred approach.

I am pleased to report to you that we have completed the implementation of all the recommendations from the independent and victim-centered review of UN-Women's Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH) policies and procedures.

SEA and SH constitute fundamental transgressions of UN-Women's mandate of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. We know that SEA and SH, abuse of power, harassment and discrimination are deeply rooted in inequalities and power imbalance, with SEA and SH sharing the same gendered inequalities. To tackle these issues, we aim to achieve a culture change that looks at power relations, leadership and the role of civility to build an environment where dignity and respect are the norms, including in our interactions online and with the communities we serve.

Within UN Women we have developed an inclusive workplace strategy that aims at strengthening leadership, focusing on people management and promoting diversity, inclusion and standards of conduct. All personnel are periodically informed of the standards of conduct and the mechanisms to address work-related concerns such as existing support and reporting options and disciplinary measures taken.

In 2020 our efforts further focused on scenario-based training as well as the design of a multi-phase communications campaign on sexual harassment at country level. The actions taken to raise awareness amongst potentially affected populations has differed across country and regional offices and included training implementing partners and their staff on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH), with the focus on reporting mechanisms and the development of posters and flyers in local languages with key reporting information. This is part of the work on country inter-agency PSEAH networks of UN Women, which form part of country offices in the organization of community events dedicated to the topic of reporting as part of established community-based compliance mechanisms.

On the topic of risk mitigation, SEA and SH risks are being assessed within UN Women's Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Framework since the inclusion of two respective risk labels in the Entity Standardized Risk Register in Quarter 3 of 2019. Mitigation measures are put in place where needed. Additionally, UN Women ensures that its implementation partners have minimum standards in place to prevent and response to SEA, inter alia, incorporating the requirements of UN protocols on allegations of

sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners into UN Women's Implementing Partner Policy Framework. Moreover, UN Women is working in collaboration with other UN agencies to put in place common partner assessment tools to further enhance safeguards and appropriate action related to SEA.

On the country-level response in inter-agency collaboration matters, UN Women aligns its efforts on tackling SEA and SH with the UN System and ensures a cohesive approach across our regional and country offices, while also guaranteeing coordination with a collective PSEAH strategy in country action plans overseen by respective UN Women Country Teams (UNCT) and Resident Coordinators. In addition to our Country Representatives, who represent UN Women within the UNCT effort, our SEA and SH focal points are also able to position UN Women in inter-agency initiatives in their respective locations, thus contributing to and reinforcing the UN-wide efforts.

With regard to support for survivors mentioned in the report, UN Women maintains and promotes a victim-centred approach in all matters related to SEA and SH and ensures that the voices of victims/survivors are at the heart of its efforts, including through safe and accessible reporting mechanisms, support to victims/survivors and confidential and respectful investigations.

During COVID-19, the reporting pathways available for all allegations, including SEA and SH, provided by the Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) have remained consistent, safe and accessible. Allegations of SEA are reported in near real-time through the online reporting mechanism, the iReport SEA Tracker, which is up to date.

UN-Women will continue to fight for organizational and cultural change that ends SEA and SH until it is achieved for all.

Thank you.