

**High-level Conference on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by
UN and NGO Personnel, New York, 4 December 2006**

CONFERENCE REPORT

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HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON ELIMINATING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
AND ABUSE BY UN AND NGO PERSONNEL, NEW YORK
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1. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The *High-level Conference on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and NGO Personnel* was held on 4 December 2006 in New York, USA. It was co-hosted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It was an occasion for senior leaders of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations to take stock of current achievements and challenges faced in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel and to chart the way forward. The programme is attached in Annex A.

Over 140 participants, including high level officials from the UN, non-governmental organizations, international organizations with field personnel and UN Member States as well as representatives from academia, think-tanks and victim advocates attended the day-long conference in New York (See Annex B). The main goals of the conference were: to raise awareness amongst the leadership of both UN and NGO entities on their role in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel; and to agree on a common framework to further advance the standards of conduct outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on sexual exploitation and abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13).

2. OUTPUTS

- The *Statement of Commitment on Eliminating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN and Non-UN Personnel*, endorsed by 21 UN and 24 non-UN entities was issued at the conference.
- Other outputs included agreements on the following:
 - A UN-wide strategy on sexual exploitation and abuse: The Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security (ECHA/ECPS) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse will be used to develop a UN-wide strategy to implement the Secretary-General's Bulletin.
 - To strengthen monitoring and reporting on UN performance with regard to the implementation of the Secretary-General's Bulletin.
 - Information-sharing within the UN and with NGOs and other institutions on issues of sexual exploitation and abuse.
 - To strengthen coordination between the UN and NGOs on issues of sexual exploitation and abuse.

3. SUMMARY OF PANELS AND DISCUSSIONS

a. Summary of Key Points

- Addressing the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse is of crucial importance to the effectiveness of the UN and all its partners.
- Building relationships of trust and dialogue among colleagues and partners is imperative if we are to tackle this problem with a common approach.
- The UN system has made some progress to respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, but there is much more to be done. We need to move towards an “era of action” and “organizational change” allowing for frank and open discussions on this matter with real acknowledgement of the scope of the problem and the necessity of immediate as well as longer-term strategic measures.
- The Secretary-General’s message of “zero tolerance” has still not gotten through to all stakeholders. It is often difficult to report allegations of this type of abuse (for communities, victims and staff members), and all too frequently these reports do not trigger appropriate responses.
- Effective communication campaigns and involving communities in design and implementation are also essential in establishing effective monitoring and reporting systems.
- Including the principles and obligations of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin in agreements with NGOs, with donors, with UN agencies, funds and programs as well as in agreements with host and troop-contributing countries should be standard practice and agreed to by all human resources sections and legal departments.
- *The Statement of Commitment* is not just a political statement, but includes concrete and strategic actions for partners and stakeholders. It is hoped that it will be signed by all stakeholders, including staff associations in the field.
- Response to victims should be at the “front and center” of our actions to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse. We need to create a climate that allows for effective reporting and follow-up as well as create systems that take due account of the potential psycho-social, legal and medical needs of the victim.
- UN Member States, UN agencies and partners all need to work together to implement the recommendations of the Secretary-General’s draft victim assistance strategy (A/60/877) to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to immediately support those who have been harmed.
- Sexual exploitation and abuse takes place within a wider context of gender-based violence and impunity for these crimes. To address sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel, it is imperative that we place greater emphasis on initiatives to address ongoing gender-based violence. Participants stressed the need to address root causes, including chronic poverty, lack of economic opportunities for young women and girls, pushing them into prostitution.
- Many view the increased participation of women in peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), as a key prevention measure but this has yet to be

realized in peacekeeping missions and in efforts by international humanitarian and development organizations.

There were some issues raised that need further discussion in different fora, including: pre-deployment screening of troops for any misconduct related to sexual exploitation and abuse or gender-based violence; DNA sampling in paternity cases; recreation and welfare facilities as one critical preventive measure; and the possibility of revisions to agreements with host countries to include specific mention of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including measures to address the problem within available, national legal mechanisms.

b. Actions for Leaders

- Managerial accountability: managers should take the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse seriously and personally. “Creating and maintaining” an environment free from sexual exploitation is the responsibility of all managers. Managers need to be vigilant on this issue and act swiftly when these acts do occur.
- Repeated dissemination of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin and regular discussions with military and civilian staff at country-level about implementation should be carried out by leaders to ensure transparency and monitor progress.
- Consultation with stakeholders: managers should consult all stakeholders in developing appropriate country-level responses i.e. holding participatory discussions with communities. This will also help in developing inter-agency, rather than overlapping complaints mechanisms.
- Complaints should be victim-centered, i.e. respecting the confidentiality, safety, security, health and other needs and rights of victims.
- Information campaigns for staff and communities need to be carried out as soon as missions are established using a collaborative approach with other UN and partner organizations present.
- Managers need to ensure oversight and coordination at the country-level so that perpetrators are brought to justice and that information is brought back to victims about the status of their case. Follow-up to complaints should include discussions with the victims/complainants and their families, should they so request, so that victims are informed about the status of their cases.
- Naming and praising is an important prevention measure, for example initiating open communications between missions and troop-contributing countries on the problem of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Increasing the number of reported cases: efficient disciplinary and reporting measures result in an increase in the number of reported cases. It is important that managers recognize this as a good thing rather than encouraging a “status quo thinking” that this problem does not exist or is of low prevalence.

c. Closing Remarks

- A post-conference follow-up strategy was outlined by Mark Bowden, Chief of the Policy Development and Studies Branch, OCHA, in the closing session of

the day. Mr. Bowden summarized issues around the *Statement of Commitment*, stating that it “is the element in the missing link to make our response far more useful; it is a commitment for institutional change and responsibility.”

- Ms. Jane Holl Lute, Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, made closing remarks and reiterated that sexual exploitation and abuse does not happen in a vacuum but occurs in a general context of indiscipline. Ms. Lute stressed that it was the personal responsibility of the leaders themselves to end sexual exploitation and abuse by maintaining an environment in which such egregious acts will not occur.

4. The Way Forward

Immediately following the conference, the following steps and strategies are being acted upon:

- **UN-wide strategy on sexual exploitation and abuse:** The ECHA/ECPS Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse will be used to develop a UN-wide strategy to implement the Secretary-General’s Bulletin based on the ten commitments outlined in the *Statement of Commitment*. The Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, will be approached for his guidance on how best to engage senior UN leadership to implement the Bulletin in the most effective and rapid manner.
- **By endorsing the *Statement of Commitment*,** senior leaders from UN and non-UN entities reaffirmed their determination to prevent and respond to acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel. To achieve this goal, senior leaders agreed to focus implementation on ten key commitments as a matter of urgency. These ten commitments prioritize ten key actions, including practical measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure a swift and effective response when such acts do occur. The Statement was developed through wide consultation at the working-level, including with members of the ECHA/ECPS Task Force, a number of NGO consortia and individual NGOs as well as a range of international organizations (see Annex C). As of 4 December 2006, 21 UN entities and 24 non-UN organizations had endorsed the *Statement of Commitment*. As of 1 February 2007, 26 UN and 25 non-UN entities have endorsed the Statement.
 - Organizations wishing to endorse the Statement are asked to send an official letter to this effect from the head of their organization to the general e-mail account set up for the conference (un-ngo-highlevelconference@un.org). The conference organizers DPKO, UNICEF, UNDP and OCHA will review the state of endorsements of the Statement of Commitment in the coming year, which will then be reissued to all those who have endorsed the Statement on and following 4 December as well updated on the webpages of DPKO and OCHA.
- **Monitoring and reporting on the UN’s performance on implementation of the Secretary-General’s Bulletin:** The UN has to report annually to the General Assembly on how it is addressing system-wide sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel. This annual reporting mechanism will continue to be used to monitor and report on performance.

- **Information-sharing:** A continuous sharing of best practices and lessons learned after the conference is essential. There are plans to use existing websites such as OCHA and Reliefweb to post practical tools, examples of best practice and resources that will be accessible to UN personnel and the general public. The DPKO website will also host a page on issues related to sexual exploitation and abuse by early 2007. A training video for all staff, *To Serve with Pride: Zero Tolerance for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse* was also endorsed at the conference and will be released in 2007.
- **Coordination between the UN and NGOs:** NGOs have suggested the need for a formal mechanism to be established or the use of existing, formal mechanisms to facilitate coordination between the UN and NGOs on implementing the Secretary-General's Bulletin and on prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse. Existing formal mechanisms include the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in-country networks of focal points on sexual exploitation and abuse and the ECHA/ECPS Task Force.
- **Campaigns:** Work is underway in DPKO to launch a communications campaign to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, with specific attention to prevent the involvement of peacekeepers in prostitution.