



United Nations
Victims' Rights
Advocate

Annual Report 2020



'Entrenched discrimination,
unequal gender relations,
and profound vulnerabilities
lie at the root
of sexual exploitation
and abuse'

Jane Connors

Victims' Rights Advocate

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Imprint

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Cover

OVRA is grateful for the generous pro bono support provided by visual artist Greta Kotz (<http://gretakotz.com>), who produced a series of representational portraits portraying victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

This Annual Report's cover image is the first of a series of portraits which will be released this year. The portraits seek to convey that victims can be of any age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, religion, or ability. They are representational and do not depict real victims.

Foreword



The COVID-19 pandemic, associated public health measures, and other global crises posed considerable challenges to providing victims' support and assistance in 2020, but my Office and our advocates in the field overcame them with commitment, determination and innovation. My Office strengthened the integration of a victim-centred approach into United Nations system-wide efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. We have moved forward with a statement on the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse which should be finalized soon.

Provision of assistance and support for victims has improved, but there is still much to do. We must step up our collective efforts to translate policies and commitments into practice on the ground to fulfil the rights of victims, and meet the duty of care we owe them because they have been harmed by United Nations personnel. We need to listen to and hear the perspectives of victims, and we are developing methodologies to seek feedback from them.

Many victims do not report sexual exploitation and abuse, and the pandemic and related mitigating restrictions may have exacerbated this. There are considerable gaps in the availability of services for victims and those which exist vary in accessibility, quality, capacity and resourcing. There are no quick fixes, but what we have seen over the past three years is that having a dedicated and trusted person on the ground tasked to see that victims' rights are prioritized - someone victims trust and to whom they can turn to seek assistance and advocate on their behalf - makes a real difference. Experience has also demonstrated that having victims' rights advocates and focal points embedded in internal United Nations investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse has a significant impact on victims feeling reassured that their voices will be heard throughout the process. To that end, we need more system-wide victims' rights advocates and focal points for victims' rights across peace, humanitarian and development settings.

I am grateful to the online United Nations Volunteers, interns and staff from other offices who gave their time and expertise to support our work remotely during 2020. My Office, the Field Victims' Rights Advocates and Senior Victims' Rights Officers¹ and I will continue to work with our colleagues across the United Nations system, Member States, civil society (including national human rights institutions), and those who implement our programmes on the ground to place the rights and dignity of victims at the centre of our prevention and response efforts. We welcome your support.

Jane Connors

Victims' Rights Advocate

¹ Field Victim's Rights Advocates are full time United Nations personnel who serve as focal points in the field for victims support and assistance and carry out other functions. The Senior Victims' Rights Officer's role is dedicated to realizing victims' rights full time.

Policy

Mandate of the Victims' Rights Advocate

The Victims' Rights Advocate's mandate is to act in the interests of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel.

The Victims' Rights Advocate works to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and prioritize the rights and dignity of victims in all efforts of the United Nations system, including its agencies, funds and programmes, at their headquarters and in the field.

The Victims' Rights Advocate, with the support of her Office and Field Victims' Rights Advocates also works in collaboration with government institutions and civil society (including national and legal and human rights organizations) to build networks of support and help ensure that the full effect of local laws, including remedies for victims, are brought to bear.

In 2020, the Victims' Rights Advocate developed policy documents and initiatives to strengthen the provision of assistance and support to victims and centre their rights and dignity in the United Nations' system-wide prevention and response efforts.

■ Mapping of services available to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse

In May 2020, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) concluded a mapping of victim services and assistance in 13 countries with different United Nations footprints. The United Nations

Secretary-General called for the project in 2018 to identify system-wide gaps, overlap, lessons learned and best practices.

The countries mapped (chosen because of the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse received, geographical balance, type of United Nations presence, and risk factors) were Bangladesh, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Greece, Haiti, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique and South Sudan.

‘The mapping provided an overview of gaps, overlaps, lessons learned and good practices and will inform the development of additional tools, policies and programmes on support and assistance for victims’

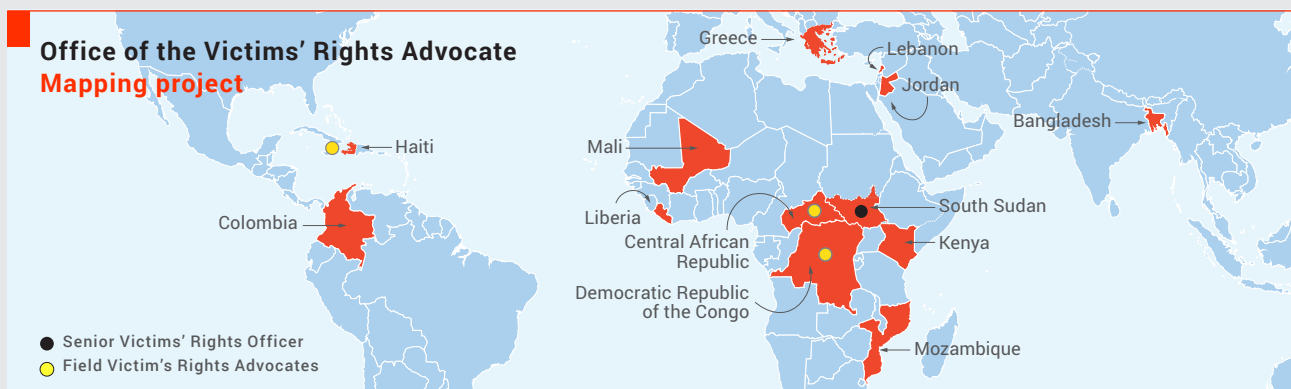
The mapping exercise surveyed United Nations entities’ capacities to facilitate, coordinate and provide assistance and support to victims, and services to which United Nations personnel might refer victims. Its aim was to assist these entities to strengthen cooperation on victim assistance in field locations. The mapping provided an overview of gaps, overlaps, lessons learned and good practices and will inform the development of additional tools, policies and programmes on support and assistance for victims.

It identified:

- heightened risk factors, such as entrenched gender-based discrimination and the power imbalance between United Nations personnel and victims as posing significant challenges for victims resulting in underreporting of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse
- the need for comprehensive mechanisms of referral for assistance
- the need to develop a system-wide, consistent and uniform method to track victims and the assistance and support they receive across each country

- the lack in availability of dedicated services for assistance specific to victims, particularly in relation to legal aid services, medical support, and support for children born as a result of the exploitation or abuse
- barriers to accessing services, such as a lack of information about the services available, transportation services, and service infrastructure in remote areas or areas affected by conflict or other challenges

In July 2020, OVRA presented these results in a webinar to United Nations colleagues across the system, highlighting next steps. Guided by the project’s recommendations, OVRA has supported the development of projects, programmes and interventions to address key gaps in victims’ support and assistance.





Mapping project | Top: Victims' Rights Advocate visit to the Colombia-Venezuela border, April 2019. UN Photo/Linda Manaka Infante Suruta. Bottom: Liberia. OVRA visit to Liberia to conduct the mapping project, December 2019 Photo/ Eric Andersen.

‘Taking a victim-centred approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse involves making no assumptions about a victim’s characteristics and treating all victims with respect, and without blame or discrimination on any grounds’

■ A Statement on Victims’ Rights

Beginning in July 2020, the Victims’ Rights Advocate led formal consultations with United Nations entities on a draft Victims’ Rights Statement which sets out the rights of victims. The statement, intended to serve as a common point of reference for all personnel working under the United Nations flag and guidance for victims so they understand their rights, underscores the United Nations’ commitment to put victims’ rights and dignity first.

Discussions with representatives of system-wide United Nations entities resulted in a refined draft which will be submitted to the High-level Steering Group for endorsement in 2021. The Victims’ Rights Statement will be complemented by guidance material which OVRA will develop for United Nations staff and related personnel to enable the full realization of victims’ rights. OVRA will also release accessible versions of the statement, including a plain language version, a child-friendly version, a version for people with disabilities, and versions in other languages.

■ Legal Aid Consultation

Victims often require legal aid and support to realize their rights or meet their needs, but these are rarely available.

To address this, in June 2020 in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF),

OVRA convened a United Nations system-wide consultation on legal aid for victims. This identified obstacles that victims may confront and put forward recommendations directed at encouraging United Nations entities to strengthen partnerships with civil society, including national human rights institutions and legal aid organizations. One of the recommendations was the creation of a roster of lawyers willing and qualified to offer pro bono legal assistance to victims in accountability proceedings, including criminal proceedings, as well as civil cases such as paternity and child support claims. OVRA is working on a methodology for creating and maintaining this roster, with a view to rolling it out in 2021.

■ Partnerships with National Human Rights Institutions

OVRA initiated efforts to strengthen its partnership with national human rights institutions through the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for the benefit of victims. National human rights institutions are well placed to support the Victims’ Rights Advocate’s mandate on the ground: they can facilitate access to legal support for victims in their countries of origin, assist with reporting mechanisms for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, contribute to training and awareness-raising activities, and push for laws, policies and programmes in support of victims.

Advocates in the field are collaborating with national human rights institutions in their respective countries. In Haiti, the Field Victims’ Rights Advocate works with the Office of the Ombudsperson so that

‘OVRA initiated efforts to strengthen its partnership with national human rights institutions through the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for the benefit of victims’

cases from remote locations in Haiti are referred for action and victims are directed to support services. In South Sudan, the Senior Victims’ Rights Officer collaborates with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan to facilitate legal assistance for victims.

Scope and Duration of Assistance and Support for Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

In October 2020, the Victims’ Rights Advocate led consultations on a draft note on the scope and duration of assistance and support for victims to guide colleagues directly assisting victims on the ground. The note is informed by the experience of the Field Victims’ Rights Advocates and others from across the United Nations system based on their regular interactions with victims. The note will be finalized in 2021.

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI)

Representing more than 110 national human rights institutions, their members and staff across all regions, GANHRI is one of the largest human rights networks worldwide. With a Head Office in Geneva and a governance structure representing National Human Rights Institutions around the world, GANHRI is truly global.

Enriched by its diversity, its membership is united by a common vision: a world where everyone everywhere fully enjoys their human rights. GANHRI works in close synergy with the four regional networks of NHRIs in Africa, the Americas, the Asia Pacific and Europe, creating one comprehensive structure of independent networks.

<https://ganhri.org/nhri/>

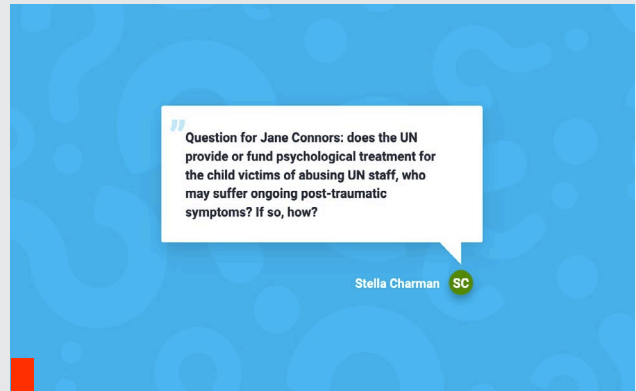
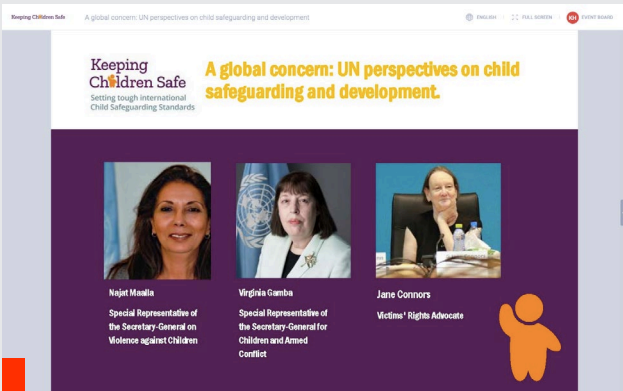
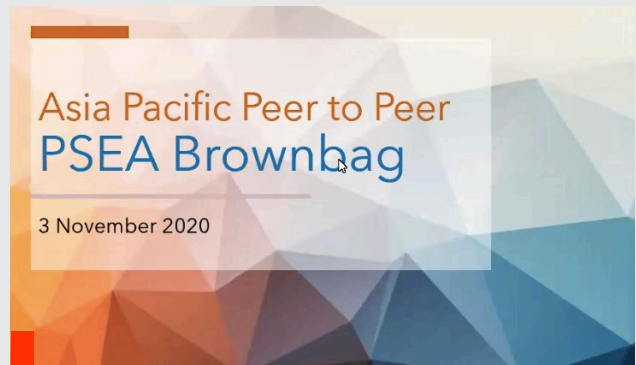


Advocacy

In light of COVID-19 related restrictions on personal interaction and travel, in 2020, the Victims' Rights Advocate capitalized on digital tools to strengthen her advocacy with Member States, intergovernmental and regional organizations, civil society, academic institutions and internally with entities of the United Nations system.

Activities included:

- launching OVRA's official Twitter Account in April 2020 (@UN_OVRA) which communicates the Victims' Rights Advocate's mandate, OVRA's initiatives, and the work of the Field Victims' Rights Advocates and Senior Victims' Rights Officers
- delivering 13 online webinars on the victims' rights approach for university students in Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, France, Ireland, Japan, Poland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States
- participating in online, ad-hoc meetings and panel events on victims' rights
- briefing representatives of Members of the [Secretary-General's Circle of Leadership](#), comprised of Heads of State and Governments of Member States committed to strengthening measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, with the Field Victims' Rights Advocate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
- participating in webinars and peer-to-peer discussions on the meaning and implementation of a victim-centred approach on the ground with Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Coordinators and United Nations Resident Coordinators' Offices
- hosting 'Voices from the Field,' an online event (co-sponsored by the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Republic of South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the Office of the Special Coordinator) where Field Victims' Rights Advocates and dedicated protection from sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators outlined their progress and challenges in coordinating and delivering system-wide provision of assistance and support to victims



RISE, Keeping the Children Safe and Asia Pacific Brownbag events. Top: RISE Survivor Town Hall UNGA, 25 September 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=645380773038169>. Middle left: Victims' Rights Advocate online meeting with RISE, 11 November 2020. Middle right: Asia Pacific Peer to Peer PSEA Brownbag, 3 November 2020. Bottom left and right: Keeping Children Safe Summit, session on "A global concern: UN perspectives on child safeguarding and development", 5 October 2020.



Voices from the Field webinar, academic institutions and UN events . Top and bottom left: Flyer for webinar hosted by the Victims' Rights Advocate "Voices from the Field" and screenshot of the webinar, 28 October 2020. Top right: Flyer for webinar at the University of Chile, 9 June 2020. Middle right: Online advertisement for webinar at the University of Oxford, 7 July 2020. Bottom right: Screenshot from UN Women Annual Gender Focal Point Meeting 'From the shadow pandemic to the hidden war on women: How to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment for all' on 7 October 2020.



United Nations
Victims' Rights
Advocate

“My call to action:
Uphold the rights of victims
of sexual exploitation and abuse
and prioritize assistance.”

Maria Nakabiito
Senior Victims' Rights Officer
South Sudan



“Mon appel à l'action:
Former le personnel nouvellement
déployé et les entrepreneurs locaux
à la prévention de l'exploitation et
des atteintes sexuelles.”

Alexandre Cudgenshey
Défenseur des droits des victimes sur le terrain
République centrafricaine



“My call to action:
Maintain frequent contact
with victims to reassure them of
support and offer encouragement.”

Carla Pessanha Loque
Field Victims' Rights Advocate
Haiti



الاستغلال الجنسي

أي إساءة استغلال فعلية أو محاولة إساءة استغلال لحالة
ضعف أو لتفاوت في النفوذ أو للثقة من أجل تحقيق
مآرب جنسية، مما يشمل على سبيل المثال لا الحصر،
تحقيق كسب مالي أو اجتماعي أو سياسي من الاستغلال
الجنسي لطرف آخر



Сексуальные отношения за вознаграждение

Обмен денег, работы, товаров или услуг на секс,
включая сексуальные услуги или другие формы
унизительного, унижающего достоинство или
эксплуататорского поведения. Это включает в
себя любой обмен помощью, причитающейся
получателям помощи.



OVRA's official Twitter account. Top, middle left and right: OVRA Call to Action social media campaign, June 2020
https://twitter.com/UN_OVRA. Bottom left and right: OVRA definition cards in Arabic and Russian.

Operational

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities, power imbalances and structural inequalities that affect victims. Domestic violence against women and children increased during the pandemic, suggesting that the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse might similarly increase.

The Victims' Rights Advocate prepared a series of operational guidance documents to assist United Nations staff and implementing partners and increase awareness of risks specific to victims in the context of the pandemic. The Victims' Rights Advocate also contributed to the development of a note on interim measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse during COVID-19, issued by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in March 2020. The note recommends actions to integrate protection from sexual exploitation and abuse activities into the COVID-19 response taking account of experience with previous public health emergencies where risks of sexual exploitation and abuse increased. These include reducing risks of sexual exploitation and abuse from the COVID-19 response, increased protection activities, establishing effective reporting channels, providing support, and inter-agency coordination.

In April, the Victims' Rights Advocate issued a joint communication with the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management, Strategy Policy and Compliance on assistance and support to

victims during COVID-19. A similar note prepared by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Victims' Rights Advocate was transmitted to United Nations humanitarian coordinators. In June, she joined the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in issuing a checklist for local stakeholders to confirm that prevention and response activities were still effective in the changed conditions brought about by the pandemic, and to prepare for pandemic-related contingencies. Context-specific checklists were prepared at the country level.

The Victims' Rights Advocate also stepped-up support to the advocates in the field as the pandemic prevented implementation of her operational mandate through field visits. To facilitate direct assistance and support for victims, Field Victims' Rights Advocates and Senior Victims' Rights Officers work in communities in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan. These advocates, who have a system-wide mandate, are the main contact for all victims on the ground. They report to the Victims' Rights Advocate, and are supported by her

‘The advocates responded innovatively to COVID-19-related challenges by facilitating victims’ access to mobile phones, reinforcing outreach through calls, text messages and emails assuring them they had not been forgotten’

Office, and also report to the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General.

Despite the challenges COVID-19 presents because of physical distancing, reduced mobility across countries, lockdowns and curfews, the Field Victims’ Rights Advocates remained in contact with victims and have continued to secure support and assistance for them. The advocates responded innovatively to COVID-19-related challenges by facilitating victims’ access to mobile phones, reinforcing outreach through calls, text messages and emails assuring them they had not been forgotten.

In June 2020, the advocates launched a two-month “call to action” social media campaign in English and French through the Office’s Twitter account (@UN_OVRA) on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse during COVID-19. This was directed at United Nations entities and partner organizations in peace, humanitarian and development settings. An online ‘Community of Practice’ was also established on the basis of regular meetings and exchange of good practices among advocates across Missions and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Coordinators.

Each advocate continued capacity-building and training activities, facilitated resolution of paternity and child support and maintenance claims, and collaborated with other United Nations entities including agencies, funds and programmes to secure support and assistance for victims from these entities and implementing partners. All of the advocates contributed to the development of projects for the

Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse²

In March 2016, the Secretary-General created the [Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) to support United Nations and non-United Nations entities’ projects that provide victim assistance and support. It funds:

- specialized services for victims and children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse, including medical care, and psychosocial support
- community outreach
- communications
- legal assistance for victims, including in paternity and child support claims
- income generation projects for victims

[Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse \(13 February 2015\) A/69/779 \[66\]](#)

² The Trust Fund is administered by the Department of Management, Strategy, Policy and Compliance.

‘Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflict, political instability, and unrest, Field Victims’ Rights Advocates have remained active in securing support and assistance for victims’

Field Victims’ Rights Advocates

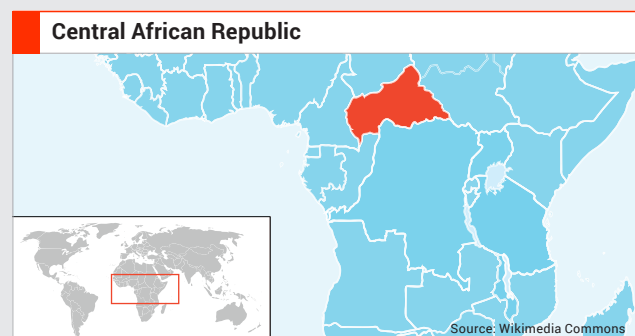
Field Victims’ Rights Advocates and Senior Victims’ Rights Officers are in place in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan. These staff are the main contact for all victims on the ground. They take steps to ensure that a victim-centered, gender- and child-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach is integrated into the United Nations support of victims. The Field Victims’ Rights Advocates and the Senior Victims’ Rights Officers report to the Victims’ Rights Advocate and the Secretary-General’s Special Representatives to ensure a cohesive and system-wide approach. They work closely with conduct and discipline teams, humanitarian actors, as well as civil society, including local human rights organizations.

Central African Republic

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing conflict, political instability, and unrest related to the recent general elections in the Central African Republic, Alexandre Cudgenslhey, the Field Victims’ Rights Advocate, has remained active in securing support and assistance for victims in collaboration with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force, and the gender-based violence and child protection sub-clusters. He:

- located victims and witnesses, and secured interview appointments for them and investigation officers

- referred victims to implementing partners for needs assessment and services
- facilitated DNA sample collection to support the resolution of paternity and child maintenance claims
- supported victims to open bank accounts so they could receive child-support payments
- organized transportation for victims in remote locations to service providers and vice versa
- followed up with implementing partners on the status of assistance provided to victims and children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse
- helped, with assistance from the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection, a victim acquire a certificate of nationality and an identification card
- led awareness-raising and training sessions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for national and international implementing partners providing gender-based violence services



‘The Field Victims’ Rights Advocates and the Senior Victims’ Rights Officers report to the Victims’ Rights Advocate and the Secretary-General’s Special Representatives to ensure a cohesive and system-wide approach’

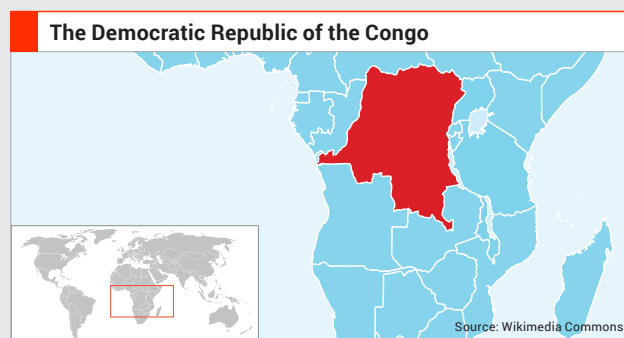
- raised awareness of assistance for victims and his role through local radio and interviews with TV stations
- led community discussion for groups in vulnerable situations (including sex workers, women, and internally displaced persons) on United Nations rules and policies on sexual exploitation and abuse, and avenues for reporting and assistance
- organized awareness-raising and training sessions on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and the Secretary-General’s victim-centred approach, including for artists belonging to “Collectif 236,” as well as a network of NGOs promoting and defending human rights
- convened workshops on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and victims’ assistance for civil society, including in partnership with the Network of NGOs for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights in the Central African Republic

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Field Victims’ Rights Advocate for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christine Besong, has continued to support victims on the ground despite compounding political, health and economic challenges this year. She facilitated assistance (predominantly medical and psychosocial support) for 32 victims through local partners and in collaboration with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), United Nations Population

Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF. In particular, she provided significant support to victims of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse related to the response to the tenth Ebola outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. She:

- provided relocation and temporary accommodation for victims
- arranged transportation for victims, particularly in remote areas, to service providers
- referred victims to mission medical facilities
- collected DNA samples for the resolution of paternity and child support claims
- delivered training for community-based complaint networks for community leaders, local authorities, civil society, and women and youth groups to strengthen their role in awareness-raising for victims including reporting and assistance
- advised and supported the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s Task Force October/November mission on protection from sexual exploitation





Field Victim's Rights Advocates. Top left: Alexandre Cugdinselhey, Field Victims' Rights Advocate in Bangui, Central African Republic. Top right: Christine Besong, Field Victims' Rights Advocate in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Bottom left: Carla Pessanha Loque, Field Victims' Rights Advocate, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Bottom right: Maria Nakabiito, Senior Victims' Rights Officer, Juba, South Sudan.

‘Field Victim’s Rights Advocates work closely with conduct and discipline teams, humanitarian actors, as well as civil society, including local human rights organizations’

and abuse to the country, which focused on reviewing the existing structures, services, and preventive measures in place in order to put forward recommended actions to strengthen the response³

- coordinated the launch of new Trust Fund projects across the country providing school fees and supplies for children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse and additional vocational projects for dressmaking and bread making
- provided on the ground support to victims while embedded in the Office of the Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) investigations into sexual exploitation and abuse in Beni during the response to the tenth Ebola outbreak

Haiti

In Haiti, the Field Victims’ Rights Advocate, Carla Loque, continued to provide support and assistance for victims in collaboration with other United Nations entities. She:

- facilitated medical, travel and accommodation support for victims in collaboration with the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and medical assistance with UNFPA
- facilitated educational support for children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse, in



cooperation with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- facilitated DNA sample collection to support the resolution of paternity and child support claims
- worked with lawyers and legal aid organizations to provide legal assistance to victims for paternity and child support claims in the countries of origin of the alleged fathers
- with UNDP, developed a Trust Fund project to provide support to victims and their children, which includes socio-economic and psychological support for children, income generation activities, legal assistance and community awareness-raising
- collaborated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on a Central Emergency Response Fund project for life-saving assistance to children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse

³ The PSEA Field Support Mission did not have an investigation focus and was carried out as a distinct exercise from ongoing investigations and the Independent Commission.

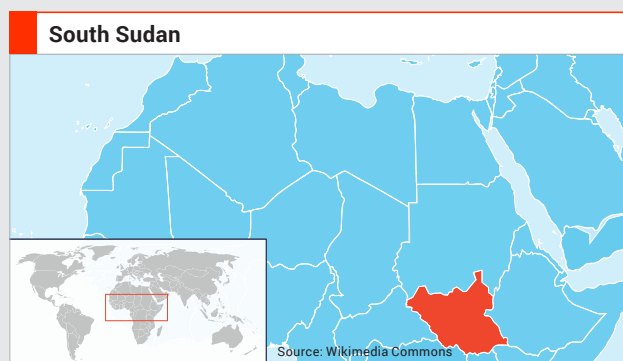
‘These staff are the main contact for all victims on the ground. They take steps to ensure that a victim-centered, gender- and child-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach is integrated into the United Nations support of victims’

- cooperated with the Haitian Ombudsperson’s office to refer cases of sexual exploitation and abuse to sister agencies in the countries of origin of the perpetrator to facilitate assistance for victims and accountability initiatives

South Sudan

Maria Nakabiito, the Senior Victims’ Rights Officer in South Sudan, remained committed to providing support and assistance to victims despite challenges presented by COVID-19. She collaborated with heads of field offices, community-based complaints mechanisms and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse focal points in the field to provide continued support to victims and maintained contact with victims by phone and email. She:

- Arranged a rent advance for victims where COVID-19 mitigation precluded their evacuation to safe shelter with assistance from the United Nations Mission in South Sudan
- facilitated medical and psychosocial assistance for victims through specialized service providers
- maintained remote contact with victims and stakeholders on child maintenance and support
- engaged with community-based complaint mechanisms which in one case provided access to pro bono legal assistance for a victim resulting in a conviction of the perpetrator in traditional courts (with a 5-year custodial sentence)
- initiated discussions with rule of law practitioners on practices, particularly related to child marriage, that compromise victims’ enjoyment of human rights
- coordinated with the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force on the development of a system-wide victim assistance tracking system
- engaged United Nations entities, including IOM and UNICEF, to facilitate victim assistance in cases which involved possible repatriation and child support
- solicited proposals from implementing partners to develop a Trust Fund project for victims in collaboration with the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force
- organized provision of psychosocial, medical and repatriation support to victims in coordination with the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force



Roadmap for 2021

■ Expanding our field presence

A priority for OVRA remains the deployment of more Field Victims' Rights Advocates, Senior Victims' Rights Officers and focal points for victims' rights in other countries with a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. This was one of the recommendations of the pilot mapping project.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also reinforced the importance of having dedicated advocates in the field to facilitate victim assistance and support. Advocates tell us that for victims, the knowledge that there is a dedicated person within the United Nations responsible for making sure their rights and dignity are respected gives them confidence and facilitates investigations and follow-up.

■ Roll-out of the Victims' Rights Statement and complementary guidance

In 2021, OVRA will roll-out the Victims' Rights Statement after its endorsement by the High-level Steering Group, along with versions of the Statement in plain language, child-friendly language, for people with disabilities, and translated into other languages. OVRA will also develop a complementary guidance note for United Nations staff and related personnel. Guidance on implementation will also be formulated.

■ Methodology on sourcing victims' feedback

OVRA is developing a methodology for gathering feedback from victims about their experiences receiving assistance and support. Information

collected will be used to improve and centre the perspectives of victims in the United Nations country-level provision of assistance and support. The methodology will incorporate the principles of a victim-centred approach and be tailored to each country and cultural context. OVRA plans to pilot the methodology in countries with Field Victims' Rights Advocates or Senior Victims' Rights Officers by the end of 2021.

■ Legal Aid Consultation

This work includes developing a roster of pro bono lawyers to provide legal aid to victims.

Other recommendations which will be followed up include:

- raising Member States' awareness of the challenges to providing legal aid to victims;
- working with national human rights institutions to address legislative and procedural barriers preventing victims from accessing justice; and
- exploring further funding opportunities for legal assistance.

■ National human rights institutions

OVRA will strengthen its relationships with national human rights institutions through its partnership with GANHRI to strengthen support for victims.

■ Training Module

In the second quarter of 2021, OVRA, in collaboration with OHCHR and IOM, will begin the development

‘A priority for OVRA remains the deployment of more Field Victims’ Rights Advocates, Senior Victims’ Rights Officers and focal points for victims’ rights in other countries with a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse’

of a training module on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment focused on victims’ rights and assistance. The training module will raise awareness among United Nations staff and related personnel and implementing partners on the rights of victims and the meaning of a victim-centred approach in practice. The training module will incorporate the work of the Chief Executives Board Task Force on Sexual Harassment, which is developing a common understanding of a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment.

Resources

United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel (Strategy, A/RES/62/214). The purpose of the Strategy is to provide guidance on, and facilitate the provision of assistance and support to, victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. The Victims' Rights Advocate works with all parts of the United Nations system, Member States, civil society, including human rights institutions, the media and others to integrate a system-wide response to victim assistance in line with the Strategy.

Secretary-General's Bulletin: Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

The Secretary-General, for the purpose of preventing and addressing cases of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, promulgated the bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (SGB 2003/13) following the General Assembly's resolution of 15 April 2003, "Investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa" (57/306). The Bulletin sets out specific standards on the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse and outlines the roles and responsibilities of Heads of Departments, Offices and Missions in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

The Protocol elaborates a set of principles and guidance on the roles and responsibilities of United Nations actors in the field aimed at strengthening a coordinated, system-wide approach to the provision of assistance and support to victims and prioritizing their rights and dignity. This approach is aligned with broader United Nations efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and takes into account established good practices to address gender-based violence.

Interim Technical Note: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse During Covid-19 Response

The Interim Technical Note produced as a result of collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO), UNFPA, UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP), IOM, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), CHS Alliance, InterAction, and the Victims' Rights Advocate, and endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, recommends actions and sets out resources for entities and implementing partners to assist in the delivery of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse activities in the context of COVID-19.

Interim Guidance: Checklist to Protect from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during COVID-19

The Checklist accompanies the full Interim Technical Note on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse during the COVID-19 Response.



United Nations
Victims' Rights
Advocate

'As the Secretary-General
said, there is no magic wand.
Just a lot of work'

Jane Connors

Victims' Rights Advocate