



**United Nations**  
Office of the Victims'  
Rights Advocate

# Annual Report 2023



'I seek to create ways to ensure that victims know their rights and are empowered to claim them, and that our staff and related personnel understand the impact of any harms they cause.'

**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 Livia Mourao ([www.nagaiola.com](http://www.nagaiola.com)), who produced the cover for this Annual Report.

The portrait, which does not depict a real victim, aims to demonstrate that there is no unique profile of a victim but there is strength in all.

# Foreword



Significant progress in realizing implementation of the Secretary-General's policy of placing the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse at the centre of prevention and response has been made since I took up the position of Victims' Rights Advocate in September 2017. There is greater understanding of the policy and implementation has strengthened. This is particularly the case in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan where Senior Victims' Rights Officers mirror my role on the ground.

In 2023, the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) launched a Statement on the Rights of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations and related personnel directed to ensuring that victims know and understand their rights. It also serves as a common point of reference for anyone working for or with the United Nations. The Statement, available in all United Nations languages and some national and local languages, resulted from several years of inclusive and open consultation with all parts of the United Nations system and was endorsed by the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, the body which oversees implementation of the Secretary-General's strategy on ending sexual exploitation and abuse. To push forward implementation of the victims' rights approach, my Office disseminated a scenario-based training module on the victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment prepared in partnership with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Secretariat of the Chief Executives Board

for Coordination (CEB) Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the United Nations System. It and other resources on implementation of the victims' rights approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment are available on the United Nations website at [un.org/victimsrightsfirst](https://un.org/victimsrightsfirst) and on the UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment at [shknowledgehub.unwomen.org](https://shknowledgehub.unwomen.org).

I continued to visit Member States with varying United Nations footprints to see how the victims' rights approach is implemented on the ground. I met with victims to hear their feedback on whether the support they require is being delivered appropriately and gaps that need to be addressed. During 2023, I visited Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Liberia, Mali, South Africa and Thailand and interacted with State and United Nations entities, civil society organizations, including national human rights organizations, legal aid bodies and academia. Several of these visits focused on advocacy to encourage timely resolution of paternity/child maintenance cases relating to children born of sexual exploitation or abuse.

Throughout 2023 my Office provided ongoing support to the Senior Victims' Rights Officers who develop innovative solutions for victims and their children in increasingly challenging circumstances. They maintain close contact with victims, coordinate assistance, accompany them in investigations and keep them updated on their cases. They show that the presence of a full-time staff member qualified and dedicated to realizing victims' rights provides

comfort to those affected and restores trust in our Organizations. The Secretary-General has called for the creation of Senior Victims' Rights Officer posts in any context where they are needed, and reinforcement of those deployed through the addition of financial and human resources. While no new post has been established, victims' rights focal points who take on this role along with their existing duties have been designated in six countries with United Nations presences. Positively, the Global Fund, IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have created positions for a dedicated staff to promote the interests of victims, and these have all been recruited or are under recruitment.

The steps forward in 2023 in embedding a victims' rights approach to prevention and response to sexual misconduct through my advocacy, the work of OVRA and the Senior Victims' Rights Officers will be built on in 2024. Our priority will be implementation of this approach and ensuring that the voices of victims are heard and listened to, and their views inform our work.

We welcome your support.



**Jane Connors**

**Victims' Rights Advocate**

# Policy and Training

## ■ Mandate

The Victims' Rights Advocate is tasked to lead efforts to prioritize the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by anyone working for or with the United Nations, including its agencies, funds and programmes, and those who implement their action on the ground at headquarters locations and in the field.

With the support of her Office and the Senior Victims' Rights Officers in the field, the Victims' Rights Advocate collaborates and advocates with Member States and their institutions, international intergovernmental, regional and subregional organizations and civil society, including national human rights institutions and legal aid organizations. She and her staff seek to create awareness of the behaviour people should expect from United Nations and related personnel, encourage the development of reliable and context-specific reporting pathways for victims, foster networks of support so assistance is rapidly and sensitively provided, champion victims' rights during United Nations and national accountability processes and push forward resolution of paternity/child maintenance cases related to children born of sexual exploitation and abuse. Throughout, they maintain regular contact with victims to keep them updated on the progress of cases.

## ■ Training module on a victim-centred approach

Launched in January 2023, the training module on the meaning of victims' rights and the application of a victim-centred approach to sexual misconduct among all United Nations and related personnel, including implementing partners, is based on five

scenarios, reflecting real events, through which training participants identify the content of a victims' rights approach and actions which are not victim-centred. The module includes a short film entitled *I have the right*, in which actors portray the perspectives of real victims of sexual misconduct by United Nations staff and related personnel and statements of the Victims' Rights Advocate and

United Nations senior staff. The module is freely available and can be adapted for differing contexts and is included on the *Victims' Rights First* webpage (<https://www.un.org/victimsrightsfirst>) along with other materials. French and Spanish translations of the webpage have been completed, with translations in Arabic, Chinese, Russian forthcoming in 2024.

In 2023, OVRA delivered the module to several Member State entities, the CEB Task Force, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment, the United Nations Volunteer programme and volunteers, the United Nations Gender Focal Points in Vienna, United Nations Department of Safety and Security gender focal points, staff of the OHCHR, the WHO, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the United Nations Country Team in Indonesia. In total, in 2023, presentations related to the training were provided to over 525 participants (98 in-person, over 430 virtually). The training module itself was delivered to 350 participants (240 virtually, 110 in-person). To facilitate broad and continued delivery of the training, the OVRA is creating a pool of facilitators through training-of-trainers sessions. Two virtual training-of-trainer sessions were delivered to 38 participants in November and December 2023, and will continue in 2024.

## **The Victims' Rights Statement**

The Secretary-General's High-Level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse endorsed the United Nations Statement on the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel ('Victims' Rights Statement') in May 2023. The Statement was crafted through extensive consultations across the United Nations system and with external experts, including national commissioners and advocates for victims. It is based on the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel (A/RES/62/214, annex),

international human rights instruments and other official documents and affirms that victims of sexual misconduct are entitled to be treated with respect; to receive assistance and support; to justice and accountability; to decide how involved to be in United Nations or national processes; to get information; to be heard; to privacy and confidentiality; to be protected; to a remedy; and to complain of the treatment received from the United Nations. The Statement is intended to ensure victims know and understand their rights and serve as a common point of reference for anyone working for or with the United Nations.

The Victims' Rights Statement is available in all United Nations official languages. United Nations colleagues and partners have organized translations of the full or simplified versions of the Statement in national and local languages including Bahasa Indonesia, Burmese, German, Haitian Creole, Khmer, Polish, Portuguese, Swahili and Ukrainian. Child-friendly and accessible versions will be released in 2024. All versions will be housed on a dedicated webpage at [un.org/victimsrightsfirst](https://un.org/victimsrightsfirst).

As part of the Statement's global roll-out and to mark the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence from 25 November to 10 December 2023, the OVRA launched a social media campaign on X (Twitter) to highlight each of the ten rights it contains and describe how Senior Victims' Rights Officers contribute to their realization in field settings.

## **Engagement with Resident Coordinators**

In 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate briefed twelve incoming Resident Coordinators on their responsibility and accountability to protect local populations from sexual exploitation and abuse and uphold the rights of victims in line with the Management and Accountability Framework of the United Nations Development and Resident Coordinator System. The Victims' Rights Advocate's standard briefing note on steps required to fulfil the provisions of the Management and Accountability

## 'More action is required to craft a sustainable, victim-centred approach so fathers live up to their parental responsibilities for their children to enjoy their rights and not be left behind.'

Framework related to victims' rights is updated regularly so guidance is current.

The Victims' Rights Advocate briefed resident and humanitarian coordinators on her mandate and work and on the implementation of the victims' rights approach to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in peace, development, and humanitarian settings during their annual global meeting in November 2023 at United Nations Headquarters in New York. She also briefed several United Nations Country Teams in town hall meetings during the year. These included such meetings in Indonesia and Thailand which attracted over 700 staff.

In her engagements with Resident Coordinators, the Victims' Rights Advocate encourages the nomination of staff within United Nations Country Teams to serve as victims' rights focal points to champion victims' rights along with their other functions. In 2023, victims' rights focal points were designated in Botswana, Cuba and Liberia.

She underlines the fact that Resident Coordinators are not only responsible for preventing sexual misconduct by United Nations or related personnel and coordinating a robust victim-centred approach if it occurs, but also for facilitating support to victims who may come forward many years after the abuse or exploitation. This responsibility is of particular importance in the context of transitions from peace missions to other United Nations presences, particularly as victims may not come forward until after a mission has closed.

The Victims' Rights Advocate continued her bilateral engagement with Resident Coordinators in States which have contributed personnel to United Nations peace operations on steps to resolve paternity and/or child maintenance claims of those personnel, such as Argentina, Liberia, South Africa and Uruguay.

### ■ Paternity and child maintenance claims

Advocacy with Member States and collaboration within the United Nations system for the resolution of outstanding paternity and child support claims to uphold the rights and dignity of children born of sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel contributed by Member States to United Nations peace operations continues to be a significant area of the Office's work. The Victims' Rights Advocate and her Office participated actively in the United Nations Secretariat High-level taskforce and working group on paternity claims ensuring that the rights and dignity of victims and children born of sexual exploitation and abuse are upheld in the development of a reinvigorated framework to govern the Organization's obligation to cooperate with Member States to facilitate resolution of these claims. Some Member States have moved forward on claims related to their personnel deployed to United Nations peace operations, including by encouraging fathers to reach amicable agreements with the children's mothers. But more action is required to craft a sustainable, victim-centred approach so fathers live up to their parental responsibilities for their children to enjoy their rights and not be left behind.



In March/April 2023, accompanied by the Senior Victims' Rights Officer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and an officer of the Department for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Victims' Rights Advocate visited Pretoria, South Africa to encourage it to use its good offices to facilitate the amicable resolution of claims related to personnel South Africa deployed to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The visit strengthened trust and confidence between the senior officials in South Africa and the United Nations and dialogue has continued, including with the United Nations Resident Coordinator. Notably, an interdepartmental task force is being established to facilitate provision of comprehensive support to victims and their children.

<h1>حقوقك</h1> <p>بوصفك ضحية لاستغلال جنسي أو انتهاك جنسي ارتكبه موظف بالأمم المتحدة أو أحد الأفراد المرتبطين بها</p>	<h1>你的权利</h1> <p>作为联合国工作人员或有关人员 性剥削或性虐待行为的受害人</p>	<h1>Your Rights</h1> <p>As a victim of sexual exploitation or abuse committed by United Nations staff or related personnel</p>
<h1>Vos droits</h1> <p>en tant que victime de faits d'exploitation ou d'atteintes sexuelles de la part de membres du personnel des Nations Unies ou du personnel apparenté</p>	<h1>Ваши права</h1> <p>как лица, ставшего жертвой сексуальной эксплуатации или сексуальных надругательств со стороны сотрудников Организации Объединенных Наций или связанного с ней персонала</p>	<h1>Tus derechos</h1> <p>Como víctima de explotación o abusos sexuales cometidos por personal de las Naciones Unidas o personal asociado</p>



**Policy and Training** | Top: Snapshot of Victims' Rights Statement in all United Nations official languages (Design: United Nations Department of Global Communications). Bottom left: VRA Jane Connors and OVRA delivering training on the victim-centred approach to UNDSS gender focal points, October 2023 (Credit: Bakyt Beshimov). Bottom right: Social media card for the right to be respected (Victims' Rights Statement) from OVRA's X campaign commemorating the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence (Design: Department of Global Communications).

# Advocacy

**The Victims' Rights Advocate continued to engage with Member States, entities of the United Nations system, international, regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations, civil society, including national human rights institutions, legal aid organizations and academic institutions to push forward the Secretary-General's victims' rights centred policy by exchange of good practices and innovative ideas. In 2023, she:**

- Advocated for system-wide implementation of the victim-centred approach at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Technical Workshop on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment in Nairobi in January 2023. Participants included Senior Victims' Rights Officers, victims' rights focal points, inter-agency prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse coordinators, and members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Technical Advisory Group.
- Convened the launch of international non-governmental organization Keeping Children Safe's online course *A Human Rights Based Approach to Child Safeguarding in Peacekeeping operations*.
- Participated in the annual meeting and peer-learning session of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) Reference Group on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment in Paris and reflected on the overarching environment relating to support to victims in prevention and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment internationally, in particular since the adoption of the 2019 DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment.
- Served on the advisory board and supported the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as it developed a Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH). Relatedly, she participated in a conference in Wilton Park, the FCDO's executive agency, providing a forum for strategic discussion in the lead-up to the launch of CAPSEAH.
- Participated in the global online launch of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Assessment module of the UN Partner Portal.
- Continued to engage with the CEB Task Force on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System established in 2017 and joined UN Women in participating in the launch of the [UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment in the UN System](#), a resource which brings together United Nations resources on addressing sexual harassment to improve knowledge-sharing, support services and exchange of good practices throughout the United Nations system and beyond.

## The Victims' Rights Advocate continued to push forward the Secretary-General's policy of placing victims' rights and dignity at the centre by exchange of good practices and innovative ideas.

- Discussed the promotion of the rights and dignity of women and children with the South African Human Rights Commission, civil society organizations, and human rights experts while on an official visit to South Africa.
- Addressed a virtual panel convened by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) on understanding the victims' rights approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, which attracted the participation of over 100 attendees from DFAT's development and humanitarian areas.
- Participated in third episode of the WHO #NoExcuse podcast, *Standing in their shoes: insights from a trailblazer in victim and survivor's rights*, released in December 2023.
- Spoke at the WHO Preventing and Responding to Sexual Misconduct Stakeholder Review Conference, which took stock of progress and challenges in prevention and response for sexual misconduct since 2021.
- Served on the Advisory Group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Expert Panel on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment Investigations to meet a victim/survivor-centred approach.
- Provided expertise on applying a victim-centred approach to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly in humanitarian contexts in her role as member of the External Advisory Group of the World Food Programme's (WFP) Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

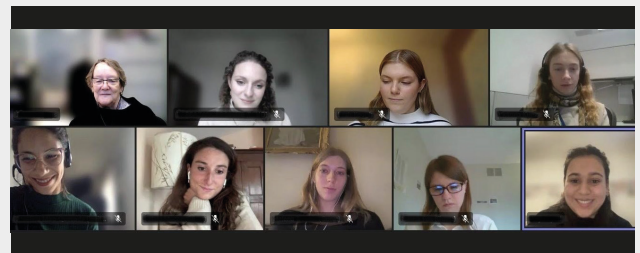
### Forum Theatre

The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate organized and co-sponsored, together with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland, UNICEF and UN Women, an interactive theatre performance entitled 'Fit for PSEAH?' produced by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Zürich-based professional theatre group 'Kuckuck'. Performances were hosted by UNICEF at its headquarters, one for International Gender Champions, Member States' permanent representatives and senior United Nations officials on 9 October 2023, and another on 11 October 2023 for expert-level delegates and United Nations staff. The events underscored the power of theatre to reshape mindsets and behaviour and centre the rights and dignity of victims and fostered engaging discussions around sexual misconduct.

**In 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate and her Office also delivered briefings, initiated new collaboration, and participated in meetings:**

- Discussed the work of the Office, the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and opportunities for accountability with members of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) of the Council of Europe.
- Participated in a conference of expert practitioners to communicate good practices in the use and collection of DNA samples for the resolution of paternity and child support claims and facilitated a session on the victim-centred approach in the use of DNA testing/triangulation for establishing paternity at a workshop convened by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Cape Town, South Africa.
- Fostered greater cooperation with intergovernmental bodies and committees, through informal briefings to experts of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and of the General Assembly's Fifth Committee on the mandate of the Victims' Rights Advocate, operational requirements and activities carried out by Senior Victims' Rights Officers and resource needs.
- Briefed the UN Women Annual Global meeting of Gender Focal Points on their role in supporting implementation of the principles on a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment.
- Delivered the first briefing on a victims' rights approach to sexual exploitation and abuse to the Special Committee on Peace Operations (C 34).
- Discussed a victim-centred approach to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in a meeting with former Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins and Natasha Fox, who works with the Deputy Chief of the Australian Army.

**The Office strengthened engagement with the United Nations internal justice system on the victims' rights-based approach through briefing new United Nations Dispute Tribunal (UNDT) and United Nations Appeals Tribunal (UNAT) judges on the victims' rights approach and the work of the Office during their administrative induction programme in June 2023. With the UNHCR Senior Victim Care Officer, a clinical psychologist, the Victims' Rights Advocate briefed UNDT judges on good practices and practical considerations directed to upholding the rights and dignity of victims in sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment matters in October 2023.**



**Advocacy** | Top left: Victims' Rights Advocate Jane Connors addressing Gender Champions at the 'Fit for PSEAH?' performance, October 2023 (Credit: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas). Top right: 'Fit for PSEAH?' forum theatre performance, October 2023 (Credit: UN Photo/Rick Bajornas). Middle left: Resident Coordinator for South Africa Nelson Muffuh, VRA Jane Connors and Director-General of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation Zane Dangor in South Africa, April 2023 (Credit: UNIC Pretoria/Ropafadzo Chiradza). Middle right: VRA Jane Connors with fellow participants at the WHO PRS Stakeholder Review Conference, November 2023 (Credit: Pierre Albouy). Bottom left: Virtual launch of the UN System-wide Knowledge Hub on Addressing Sexual Harassment, June 2023 (Credit: UN Women). Bottom right: VRA Jane Connors and current and past interns during quarterly Community of Practice for OVRA Interns (Credit: OVRA).

# Operational

## ■ Country Visits

**Visiting countries and meeting directly with victims of sexual exploitation and abuse enables the Victims' Rights Advocate to hear from victims, gain a first-hand understanding of how United Nations entities are preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse, and discuss how to strengthen support and assistance for victims with United Nations leadership and other stakeholders.**

### Mali

In January/February 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate visited Mali to assess implementation of her mandate and facilitate system-wide discussions on the victims' rights approach and how it can be implemented in practice, especially in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and associated bodies. The Victims' Rights Advocate and the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse visited Timbuktu and met with the Governors of Timbuktu and Taoudeni, as well as members of the community-based complaints network (CBCM).

In both Bamako and Timbuktu, the Victims' Rights Advocate met with victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel. In Bamako she visited the first 'One-Stop Centre' established in Mali which provides victims of gender-based violence with access to medical, legal and psychological support. While in Bamako she also addressed a

group of students at the Law Faculty of the University of Bamako. During the second half of 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate cooperated with United Nations partners to encourage the establishment of safeguards for victims and safe and accessible reporting channels for sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment during the drawdown of and closure of MINUSMA.

### Democratic Republic of the Congo

In follow-up to her visit to Pretoria, South Africa earlier in 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo in July/August to accompany victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and their children alleged to have been fathered by South African personnel, at their request, during the collection of DNA samples to establish paternity by South Africa's Paternity Maintenance Support Team (PMST) on its visit to Goma. The Victims' Rights Advocate met with other victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and their children upon their request to accompany them during the communication to them of DNA paternity test results based on samples that had been collected in 2021.

In Goma and Kinshasa, the Victims' Rights Advocate met with United Nations leaders and staff at all levels in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and other United Nations entities, State officials, the diplomatic community and civil society organizations to assess the implementation of her mandate in the country and explore ways to facilitate the resolution of paternity and child support claims

based on a victims' rights approach and strategies to prevent the conduct leading to such claims in the future.

In September 2023 the Victims' Rights Advocate deployed a staff member from her Office to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to strengthen the capacity of the Senior Victims' Rights Officer in supporting victims of sexual exploitation and abuse during court martial hearings before South African Military Courts held in Beni (Kivu). The OVRA staff facilitated legal assistance, ensured that victims were informed of the conduct of the proceedings and that they received psychological support.

## Liberia

The Victims' Rights Advocate visited Monrovia, Liberia in August 2023 to follow up steps taken by the Republic of Nigeria to facilitate resolution of paternity and child support claims regarding children born of sexual exploitation and abuse by Nigerian personnel deployed to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) after a delegation from Nigeria collected DNA samples from mothers and children in 2022 to facilitate resolution of the claims.

Supported by the Resident Coordinator and the newly-appointed Victims' Rights Focal Point she met with senior State officials, Government ministries, civil society, including the Bar Association and the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, and the diplomatic community to identify capacity to provide for support and assistance for victims and their children.

The Victims' Rights Advocate and Victims' Rights Focal Point met with victims individually and as a group and visited the capacity-building project in Monrovia funded by the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. She also addressed 'the Sisters' Tribe,' a network of women United Nations staff to discuss measures to prevent and address sexual exploitation, abuse and/or harassment.

## Southeast Asia






In October/November 2023, the Victims' Rights Advocate visited Thailand, Cambodia and Indonesia to address application of the victims' rights approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in development contexts. In Bangkok, she met with the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and regional United Nations offices, and she participated in a "Town Hall" meeting of United Nations Thailand attended by over 600 United Nations system staff. In Phnom Penh, Cambodia she discussed promotion of a victim-centred framework to sexual misconduct with United Nations staff, civil society organizations, the Ministry of Women Affairs of Cambodia and the Cambodian Human Rights Committee, and she also visited the National Centre for Peacekeeping Force, Mine, and Explosive Remnants of War Clearance (NPMEC).

In Jakarta, Indonesia the Victims' Rights Advocate facilitated a table-top exercise on the victim-centred approach for senior United Nations staff using a scenario specifically developed for the Indonesia country context. She participated in a "Town Hall" meeting attended by over 100 United Nations system staff and met with Ministries and Government interlocutors active in upholding the rights of women and children to advocate and discuss challenges in ensuring the rights of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. She also met with the National Commission on Human Rights to discuss upholding victims' rights, women's rights and child rights in practice.



## Senior Victims' Rights Officers

Throughout 2023, Senior Victims' Rights Officers in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan, who as in the case of the Victims' Rights Advocate have a system-wide mandate, strengthened collaboration on realizing victims' rights with peace, development and humanitarian actors. They show that the presence of dedicated, expert and trusted advocates on the ground, tasked with prioritizing victims' rights, makes a real difference to victims and children born of sexual exploitation and abuse. They coordinate assistance and support for victims, accompany them as they report and through the investigation and consideration of their complaints. They support victims in internal and external accountability processes, and provide them with follow-up information, including on the progress of paternity/child maintenance claims. Achievements of the Senior Victims' Rights Officers in 2023 are portrayed in the following graphic.

2023 Activity highlights in the field		Frequency of support provided of persons assisted			
		South Sudan	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Haiti	Central African Republic
	Facilitated school support for children	1	247	81	*
	Facilitated medical assistance for victims and children	26	234	49	*
	Carried out field missions in country	2	6	8	3
	Facilitated training on victims' rights	31	29	5	4
	Supported victims and their children in processes for the resolution of paternity claims	0	45	22	10

\* No available data

# The nomination of focal points within United Nations Country Teams demonstrates the value of deploying victims' rights professionals on the ground.

## ■ Focal Points for Victims' Rights

**In settings without dedicated Senior Victims' Rights Officer positions, victims' rights focal points in United Nations Country Teams in Botswana, Cuba, Guatemala, Liberia, State of Palestine and Uruguay have system-wide mandates to champion victims' rights and to strengthen victim assistance strategies. Their nomination within United Nations Country Teams demonstrates the value of deploying victims' rights professionals on the ground.**

In consultation with the Victims' Rights Advocate, the focal points advise the most senior United Nations official in the country and the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force and Coordinator (where present) on the victims' rights approach to prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

The focal points coordinate assistance and support for victims and children born of sexual exploitation and abuse, including through helping colleagues to develop projects to assist victims rebuild their lives. In 2023, three new victims' rights focal points were appointed within United Nations Country Teams.

### Botswana

The Victims' Rights Focal Point in Botswana initiated a full risk-assessment, conducted trainings for all staff on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and a victim-centred approach and met with civil society to analyse the situation of victims and current standards.

### Cuba

In Cuba, the Victims' Rights Focal Point formalized agreements with national institutions on provision of assistance to victims, including one which focuses on assisting women and others providing assistance to child and adolescent victims. She has developed training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse for United Nations entity staff and national counterparts, strengthened the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Interagency Network and advanced interagency discussions on the creation of a reporting channel, which is expected to be available in 2024.

### Guatemala

In Guatemala, the Victims' Rights Focal Points designed and disseminated outreach materials on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and reporting channels and, in coordination with the Resident Coordinator's Office, initiated dialogues for the organization of prevention training, risk mitigation and response to sexual exploitation and abuse with national police. They contributed to the design of a 12-month project on strengthening local protection networks for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse led by women and organizations that provide victim-centered services in the departments of Alta Verapaz, Izabal and Huehuetenango financed by the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which aims to strengthen the community-based complaints network (CBCM) Guatemalan law for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and the availability and access to victim assistance.

## Liberia

A Victims' Rights Focal Point was appointed in 2023 to facilitate support to victims of uniformed personnel formerly deployed to UNMIL and their children born of sexual exploitation and abuse. She accompanied the Victims' Rights Advocate during her visit to Monrovia and established and maintained contact with victims with outstanding paternity claims. She collaborated with the Ministry of Gender and the Ministry of Health to facilitate issuance of birth registration and certification for children whose paternity has been established to facilitate child support and waive associated fees. She supported the Resident Coordinator to identify assistance for victims from within existing United Nations programming.

At the end of 2023, OVRA was able to transfer funds to the Resident Coordinator's Office in Liberia to cover the costs associated with obtaining birth certificates for eight children born of sexual exploitation and abuse and for mothers to open bank accounts which could receive maintenance from the fathers.

## State of Palestine

In Palestine, the Victims' Rights Focal Point mobilized resources at the field level to improve access to reporting channels for victims and mainstreamed victim assistance practices. She launched an awareness-raising campaign on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and tackling underreporting. The focal point collaborated with CBCM partners to enhance reporting, and she also contributed to the finalization of an Arabic language community outreach campaign/tool 'With You,' an interactive mix of interpersonal communication with the communities, and a package for community workers.

## Uruguay

In Uruguay, the Victims' Rights Focal Point led the establishment of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network in 2023 and organized a joint workshop for all United Nations

personnel in the country including training on the Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the victims' rights approach, facilitated by two UNICEF consultants. The focal point continued to support the Resident Coordinator's follow-up on outstanding paternity claims related to Uruguayan personnel deployed to United Nations peace operations.



**Operational** | Top left: VRA Jane Connors with the Indonesia PSEAH Network, November 2023 (Credit: Indonesia RCO). Top right: VRA Jane Connors meeting with UNCT Cambodia, October 2023 (Credit: UNinCambodia/Sreysros Keo). Middle left: VRA Jane Connors on mission in Mali, February 2023 (Credit: MINUSMA). Middle right: VRA Jane Connors and Head of MONUSCO SRSG Bintou Keita in DRC, August 2023 (Credit: MONUSCO PIO). Bottom left: VRA Jane Connors and ESCAP Deputy Executive Secretary Lin Yang, October 2023 (Credit: Valeria Bove). Bottom right: VRA Jane Connors meeting with the South African Human Rights Commission, April 2023 (Credit: UNIC Pretoria/Ropafadzo Chiradza); Meeting with Ministry of Defence and South African National Defence Force in Pretoria, April 2023 (Credit: UNIC Pretoria/Eunice Namugwe).



**Portraits of Senior Victims' Rights Officers and Victims' Rights Focal Points** | Top row (from left to right): Senior Victims' Rights Officer in the Central African Republic, Cecile D'Agostino; Senior Victims' Rights Officer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mihaela Porumb; Senior Victims' Rights Officer in Haiti, Ritu Gambhir; Senior Victims' Rights Officer in South Sudan, Maria Nakabiito. Middle row (from left to right): Victims' Rights Focal Point in Guatemala, Ana Graciela Cabrera; Victims' Rights Focal Point in Guatemala (alternate), Paola Alejandra Maria Estrada Sosa; Victims' Rights Focal Point in Liberia, Ina Christensen; Victims' Rights Focal Point in State of Palestine, Marta Agosti. Bottom row (from left to right): Victims' Rights Focal Point in Uruguay, Annika Gostowski; Victims' Rights Focal Point in Cuba, Lisy Jorge Mendez . Not pictured: Victims' Rights Focal Point in Botswana, Helen Andreasson.

# Funding

The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate was established in the United Nations programme budget in 2019. In addition to four posts funded through the programme budget, the Office receives a modest allocation under the Support Account for Peacekeeping Operations for official visits of the Victims' Rights Advocate to peacekeeping settings.

The Victims' Rights Advocate is grateful to the Governments of Australia, Israel and the United Kingdom for providing grants in 2023 to enable policy and guidance development, programme implementation, direct cash assistance to victims and visits by the Victims' Rights Advocate to the field. The Governments of Australia and Canada also provide personnel to the Office, while in 2023 the Government of Germany supported the Senior Victims' Rights Officer in the Central African Republic through the placement of a Junior Professional Officer.

The achievements set out in this report would not have been possible without their support.



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