



Department  
for International  
Development



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

Mr Antonio Guterres  
UN Secretary-General

14 March 2018

Dear Secretary General,

The recent allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the international assistance sector, exacerbated by failures in transparency and accountability, have shone a spotlight on the serious inadequacies in the response of organisations to these critical issues. Such abuse of trust and power harms the very vulnerable people who we are aiming to help and it undermines what we are trying to achieve. The recent news regarding a culture of silence around sexual harassment within UN organisations adds to this concern.

We cannot afford to delay when the legitimacy of collective action to tackle the world's most pressing problems is called into question. As the international community, we must do our utmost to prevent this and other forms of exploitation and abuse of power from happening, as well as to stop bullying and sexual harassment within UN entities. We must all take action now.

As donors, we thank you for your continued leadership on this issue. We welcome your commitment to ensure that tackling sexual exploitation and abuse remains at the top of the UN's and your own agenda, and your recognition that in order to do so, a system-wide approach is critical. In turn, we commit to scrutinise our own organisations and apply the highest standards to our own staff and programmes.

The road ahead of us will not be smooth; more reporting of incidents will challenge us all to strengthen the effectiveness of existing safeguards, to ensure that beneficiaries are always put first and to facilitate a system-wide process of improving standards and restoring trust. It will also require us to find new and better means of vetting and training and to impose tougher sanctions, including dismissal, debarment and prosecution. We need the UN system to step up and go further and faster than it has done in the past, in a joined up way. Although the levers at our disposal for combating sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse are different, we should ensure that both are addressed with the same urgency and rigour.

The Circle of Leadership and Voluntary Compact on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which you launched in September last year, are vehicles for securing the highest level of support amongst Member States. We urge that you utilise these initiatives to achieve our common objective of eliminating sexual abuse and exploitation throughout the UN system and its implementing partners. In particular, we would welcome a report on progress to the Circle of Leadership at the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September 2018.

In addition, we very much welcome your letter of 7 March to Member States, providing a useful update on the concrete actions you are taking to combat sexual harassment within the UN, and your commitment to upholding a zero-tolerance policy across the entire system.

As funders of the UN, we have a responsibility to our citizens, and to those we are providing assistance. As a minimum, we need to be able to provide them with five key assurances:

1. That all UN entities provide a safe and trusted environment which safeguards anyone they have contact with, including beneficiaries, staff and volunteers. There must be an organisational culture across the UN system that prioritises safeguarding, so that it is safe for those affected to come forward, and to report incidents and concerns with the assurance they will be handled sensitively and properly. All UN entities must have adequate safeguarding policies, procedures and measures to protect people and that are shared and understood.
2. That all UN entities have published and transparent systems in place for reporting and investigating allegations, and communication of the conclusions of these, including to funding partners such as Member States.
3. That all UN entities commit to mandatory training for all of their staff, and require their contractors to have done training, building on existing good practice in the UN and outside. The effectiveness of this training should be monitored.
4. That all UN entities take steps to mitigate safeguarding risks, and that if such risks do materialise, appropriate action is taken.
5. That all constituent parts of the UN (entities) work collaboratively and collectively to step up efforts to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse. A one UN approach that spans the UN Secretariat, funds, programmes, agencies, and peacekeeping.

We recognise your letter of 7 March goes some way in addressing the above, and we welcome your drive to harmonise policies across the system and the establishment of a High-level Task Force to tackle sexual harassment. However, we remain keen to receive broader assurances that also include sexual exploitation and abuse. In that regard, we look forward to the imminent release of your next Special Measures Report on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse. We ask you to provide us with a detailed action plan, with timelines, for how you will be implementing the points above, and other work, including how you will ensure that this reaches across the whole of the UN system.

Finally, we would like to thank you again for your leadership on this crucial matter. Across the globe there is significant appreciation of the incredible value and enormous good that the UN and others across the sector do in the field of international development. Let us, together, make sure that we do everything in our power to put an end to sexual exploitation and abuse.



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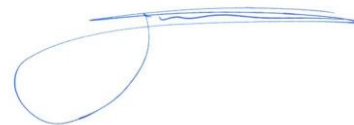
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