

“Voices from the Field”

Briefing by United Nations Field Victims’ Rights Advocates and dedicated Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Coordinators

28 October 2020 (10:00-11:30am EST) Microsoft Teams

Field Victims’ Rights Advocates in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan and dedicated inter-agency PSEA coordinators in South Sudan, Lebanon and Bangladesh/Cox’s Bazar provided overviews of the progress, good practices and challenges in coordinating and delivering system-wide provision of assistance and support to victims in line with the Secretary-General’s victim-centred strategy to address sexual exploitation and abuse. The briefing, which was also addressed by the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, Mr. Pablo de Greiff, a member of the Secretary-General’s Civil Society Board of Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Member State sponsors, provided a platform to identify the most significant gaps and possible steps forward to strengthen assistance and support for victims.

Summary notes

A victim-centred approach to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse

1. welcomed participants and expressed appreciation to the Kingdom of Bhutan, the Republic of South Africa, the United Kingdom and the Office of the Special Coordinator abuse for co-sponsoring the event. The VRA recalled the Secretary- to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse introduced in 2017, and the role of the Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan. The work extended to supporting victims of all United Nations personnel, uniformed, civilian, international and national across the United Nations system in peacekeeping, humanitarian and development settings. three inter-agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Coordinators, to focus on implementation of the Secretary- , particularly the ways in which the imperative of placing the rights and dignity of victims at the forefront has been realized in practical terms.
2. The VRA noted that in the three years since the creation of the mandate, good progress in institutionalizing a system-wide victim-centred approach had been made. This included the development of policies and tools, such as support facilitated by the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The Office conducted a pilot mapping of availability of assistance for victims in 13 countries with varying United Nations presences. This showed there are gaps especially in remote areas and those affected by conflict or health and other emergencies. There is also an urgent need for a system-wide tool to track victims, the assistance they receive and available service providers. The mapping revealed challenges in realizing accountability, as well as resolving paternity and maintenance claims for children born of sexual exploitation and abuse. She called for the strengthening of the role Rights Advocates (FVRAs) as the main contact for all victims on the ground, as well as the

designation of additional

and system-

on the location. In remote areas, basic services were at times non-existent. Significant gaps in the provision of assistance and support for victims were identified in the areas of shelter, psychosocial support, quality of medical care, security, and the provision of legal assistance and services. In this context, a shared challenge was the lack of adequate and sustainable funding and resources to provide for the assistance and support to victims, which was required for the United Nations to move from lip service to actual assistance, and for victims to become survivors.

Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

7. FVRAs reflected on the benefits of the projects supported by the Trust Fund, in particular to enable victims to self-sustain. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, three projects had been completed and six were ongoing across the country. The projects offered vocational training, capacity building, scholarships, and early reintegration into communities and provided up to 400 beneficiaries with income generating activities. Fifty-two children, including children born of sexual exploitation and abuse were receiving educational support. These projects played an important role in restoring the dignity and self-respect of victims. The Director/ALD/DMSPC referred to a recent appeal to all Member States for funds, and appreciation was expressed to the Kingdom of Bhutan for its early contribution to the Trust Fund.

PSEA coordination on the ground – good practices and challenges

8. The PSEA Coordinators briefed on their interagency role in capacity building and training of staff, conducting awareness-raising in communities, unifying reporting channels and referral of an interagency referral pathway in collaboration with the gender-based violence sub-cluster. Coordinated the development of an interagency referral pathway in collaboration with the gender-based violence sub-cluster. Coordination efforts in the PSEA Task Forces involved regular and inclusive meetings, with participation of UN entities, international and national non-governmental organizations. In South Sudan, a high-level meeting dedicated to PSEA, chaired by the DSRSG/HC/RC, is held at least once a year to sustain momentum.
9. In South Sudan, an information-sharing protocol is being prepared in by the PSEA Task Force, in close coordination with the FVRA, to enable smooth sharing of information and clarification of procedures related to victim assistance, including through the use of the Incident Reporting Form (which will soon be available electronically) to facilitate the collection of information and limit the number of interviews of victims. The activities of the FVRA were

PSEA coordinators and focal points across the system, the FVRA in South Sudan noted that regular meetings are held and practices are shared through an online community of practice.

Reporting

Sustaining PSEA focus and continuity of assistance to victims during COVID-19

15. The FVRAs described innovative means of ensuring that assistance to victims continued during COVID-19. Their mobile phone numbers were provided to all victims,

20. Notwithstanding some good practices and examples of successful paternity claims, the biggest challenge in the context of peacekeeping mission settings such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan remained the lack of responsiveness of some Member States to facilitating paternity tests and related procedures. FVRAs encouraged all Member States to intensify their collective efforts to address the gaps in collaboration with United Nations entities on the ground. In this connection, the Director/ALD/DMSPC informed participants that DMSPC and the Department of Peace Operations are preparing a high-level forum in the context of Action For Peacekeeping to renew the commitment to uphold conduct and discipline standards, and exchange good practices.

to address sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers through demanding more accountability and taking a victim-centred approach. Mr. Tshosar highlighted Bhutan contribution to the Trust Fund and its work to combat these wrongs.

24. Major General Wiseman Mbambo, Deputy Chief of Staff, South African National Defense Force expressed appreciation to the FVRAs and PSEA Coordinators for sharing practical experiences from the ground. He affirmed commitment to a victim-centred approach to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse committed by its troops serving under the UN flag. He highlighted a number of measures taken by South Africa, including its pre-deployment PSEA training, and follow-up trainings conducted in the mission