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Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy

Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations

Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/73/744](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 11 March 2019.

II. Background

2. The report of the Secretary-General is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions [72/312](#), [71/278](#) and [71/297](#). In resolution [72/312](#), its most recent resolution on United Nations action on sexual exploitation and abuse, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to report, pursuant to resolution [57/306](#), on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, including on progress made in implementing a zero-tolerance policy within the United Nations system, for consideration by the Assembly, in line with existing mandates and procedures. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution [71/297](#), the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to follow up on a number of matters, including recommendations on mitigating risk factors and to foster capacity-building and learning. In addition, in its resolution [71/278](#), the Assembly stressed the importance of further improving the collaboration between the Secretary-General, the entities of the United Nations system and Member States.



III. Status of implementation

3. The report of the Secretary-General is a progress report, providing updated information on measures to strengthen the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, under each of the strategic pillars, including: (a) prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims by means of a victim-centred approach; (b) ending impunity by implementing the policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse; (c) engaging with Member States, civil society and external partners; and, (d) improving strategic communication for education and transparency (A/73/744, paras. 1–5). The report of the Secretary-General also provides information on the following: an overview of progress in the system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse (sect. II); humanitarian action and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (sect. III); implementing partners (sect. IV); accountability in the system (sect. V); prioritizing victims' rights and dignity, including the trust fund in support of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (sect. VI); risk mitigation and ending impunity, including screening, training, reporting and investigations (sect. VII); engagement with Member States and civil society (sect. VIII); improving strategic communications for education and transparency (sect. IX); and an overview of data on allegations (sect. X).

4. **The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General is a progress report and, as such, contains no specific proposals with additional budgetary implications.**

5. The Secretary-General indicates that his strategy, which builds on the policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse, is driving a cultural transformation across the complex United Nations system (A/73/744, para. 2). The report also indicates that partnerships are being strengthened with Member States through the establishment of a voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and a “circle of leadership”, aimed at improving prevention and response efforts. In addition, the Civil Society Advisory Board, to be launched in 2019, will increase engagement with civil society and external experts (ibid., para. 4). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that 101 Member States are currently signatories to the voluntary compact. **The Committee notes the efforts of the Secretary-General to increase awareness, engagement and commitment.**

A United Nations system-wide approach

6. The initiatives undertaken and progress made across the United Nations system to implement the strategy to strengthen the organizational response to sexual exploitation and abuse are described in the report and the annex thereto. In the report, the Secretary-General also indicates that, in March 2018, the Special Coordinator¹ provided a briefing on the above initiatives to a meeting of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which is composed of the principals of the 34 United Nations entities, including the Secretariat, agencies, funds and programmes, many of which have independent governance frameworks. Furthermore, the Secretary-General indicates that the Special Coordinator has been tasked with evaluating the system-wide resources dedicated to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with General Assembly resolution 71/297 (A/73/744, para. 7; see also paras. 17–18 below).

¹ The Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was appointed by the Secretary-General in February 2016, with a time-bound mandate to organize, unify and prioritize the United Nations system-wide measures for prevention and response. (A/71/97, para. 11).

7. The Advisory Committee was provided, upon enquiry, with additional information regarding those initiatives in which members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination participate on a voluntary basis. The Committee was also informed that, although most of the initiatives have been achieved within existing resources, a number of project-based initiatives are being undertaken with extrabudgetary funding, including a mapping of victims' rights approaches and services, training for military national investigation officers and a strategic communications campaign for peacekeeping operations. The Committee recalls its previous recommendation regarding the need for a truly system-wide approach to address the matter of sexual exploitation and abuse (see [A/72/824](#), para. 7). **The Committee notes the efforts made to adopt a whole-of-system approach to addressing the matter of sexual exploitation and abuse and trusts that, to ensure consistency and coherence, additional efforts will be made through the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in this regard.**

Reporting and data collection

8. Information on reporting and data collection is provided in paragraphs 44 and 45 of the report of the Secretary-General. The Secretary-General indicates that information regarding allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse relating to personnel in peacekeeping and special political missions, other United Nations system entities, implementing partners and non-United Nations forces authorized by a Security Council mandate, covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018 is also available online ([A/73/744](#), para. 69).

9. The Advisory Committee recalls its concern over the fragmented nature of reporting and data collection and that it expected that more information on the alignment between data collection and reporting methods system-wide would be provided in the next report of the Secretary-General ([A/72/824](#), para. 12). The Secretary-General indicates in his report that an incident reporting form, which has been developed to ensure uniformity and consistency in information collection on allegations across the system, is being piloted in three countries ([A/73/744](#), para. 45). **The Committee looks forward to receiving an update on the efforts to improve the consistency of data collection and reporting in the next report of the Secretary-General.**

Data on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse

10. The Secretary-General indicates that in 2018, Member States provided information on the results of investigations conducted and accountability measures taken in relation to 28 of the allegations recorded between 2010 and 2018. Information remains pending, however, regarding; (a) the results of investigations for 63 allegations reported prior to 2018, with some dating as far back as 2013; and (b) accountability measures taken in relation to 43 allegations reported prior to 2018. Measures that have been implemented to facilitate work with Member States in ensuring criminal accountability for personnel who engaged in criminal acts are described in the report ([A/73/744](#), paras. 51–52). **The Advisory Committee notes the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General to pursue the results of investigations conducted and accountability measures taken in relation to all pending allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and trusts that further efforts will be made.**

11. The Secretary-General indicates in his report that the number of reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse under peacekeeping and special political missions has decreased, with 54 allegations reported in 2018, compared with 104 and 62 reported in 2016 and 2017, respectively ([A/73/744](#), para. 70). However, the report

also indicates that, in 2018, 94 allegations were reported against United Nations personnel in entities other than peacekeeping missions. Furthermore, reports of allegations related to personnel of implementing partners increased from 25 in 2017 to 109 in 2018 (ibid., para. 71). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that minimum standards and safeguarding measures have been put in place across the United Nations system to ensure that implementing partners have mechanisms in place to address and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. A training package and other materials are also being developed to support implementing partners. **The Committee notes with concern the significant increases in reported cases among these entities and encourages the Secretary-General to undertake further efforts in the implementation of his strategy, including in prevention and response measures, in United Nations entities beyond peacekeeping operations and special political missions, particularly those that rely on implementing partners (see also para. 16 below).**

12. On a related matter, the Advisory Committee requested additional information on the impact of measures taken to address the incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Committee was informed that the Office of the Special Coordinator is measuring progress through the mainstreaming of awareness, action and the institutionalization of procedures across the United Nations to transform the current organizational culture and ensure consistency in the way the entities of the United Nations system approach prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

13. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly has reaffirmed the collective and unanimous position that one substantiated case of sexual exploitation and abuse is one case too many (resolution 71/297, para. 4) and its commitment to the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse throughout the United Nations system, including the agencies, funds and programmes (resolution 72/312, para. 1). The Committee reiterates its view that more focus should be given to the nature of the allegations, in particular those egregious cases, rather than the number of allegations alone.**

Common screening platform

14. Details regarding the development of a common candidate screening platform to ensure that potential candidates do not have a prior record of misconduct related to sexual exploitation and abuse are provided in paragraphs 40 to 42 of the Secretary-General's report. The Secretary-General also indicates the established mechanisms regarding uniformed personnel, including certification by Member States and cross-checks of proposed personnel against the database maintained by the Department of Operational Support. In terms of strengthened recruitment screening, the report indicates that, since April 2018, self-attestations have been required in the personal history profiles of all applicants for Secretariat posts. An electronic "Clear Check" screening tool was launched in June 2018, with the objective of preventing United Nations personnel from being deployed or reemployed within the system if they had been dismissed for substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or if they left while an investigation was pending. Upon request, the Committee was provided with additional details on the Clear Check system. The Committee notes that 29 United Nations entities currently participate in the system. **The Advisory Committee notes the progress made with the new screening system towards a common screening platform within existing resources and looks forward to an update on the results of its implementation.**

Non-United Nations forces

15. With regard to non-United Nations forces and personnel, the report indicates that the United Nations has established an internal system to monitor, investigate,

report and follow up on allegations involving non-United Nations forces and personnel with the Member States concerned. The Secretary-General notes the need for further prevention and response measures related to non-United Nations international forces serving under mandated Security Council operations in order to bring standards closer to those applicable to United Nations personnel ([A/73/744](#), para. 54). The Secretary-General also highlights the unevenness between the United Nations standards and those applicable to non-United Nations international forces as having an impact on the Organization's ability to fully integrate a victim-centred approach (*ibid.*, paras. 57–58). **The Advisory Committee notes the need to align the standards applicable to United Nations uniformed personnel and that greater efforts are necessary to apply those standards equally to non-United Nations international forces.**

United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners

16. The report indicates that the United Nations protocol on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving implementing partners was finalized in March 2018 and that the requirements of the protocol are in the process of being incorporated into a draft Secretariat policy, which will include a requirement for a standard mandatory clause on sexual exploitation and abuse in written agreements with implementing partners ([A/73/744](#), para. 12). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the new protocol was developed, endorsed and distributed to all members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and is available in all official languages of the Organization. The Committee was further informed that this is the first instance where the United Nations system has put in place uniform standards for engaging with implementing partners in the context of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse. **The Advisory Committee notes the development of the protocol and looks forward to an update regarding its inclusion within Secretariat policy requirements for implementing partners.**

System-wide human and financial resources

17. As regards the human and financial resources dedicated to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, the Secretary-General indicates that, in line with General Assembly resolution [71/297](#), the Special Coordinator is to gauge the system-wide resources dedicated to the issue ([A/73/744](#), para. 7). The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its consideration of reports and communications on the subject of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in recent years, it repeatedly requested but did not receive an update on the system-wide resources dedicated to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse ([A/71/867](#), para. 21; [A/72/7/Add.27](#), para. 14; and [A/72/824](#), para. 29). The Committee notes that the report under consideration still lacks clear information relating to existing resources.

18. **The Advisory Committee notes that the report of the Secretary-General, once more, does not provide any information on human and financial resources dedicated to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in the Secretariat and across the United Nations system, in accordance with resolution [71/297](#). The Committee is of the view that further efforts need to be undertaken to identify the system-wide resources dedicated to this matter. The Committee again cautions against the potential risk of fragmentation in the different work streams relating to the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in the field and at Headquarters and encourages close coordination between field-based and Headquarters staff and United Nations agencies (see [A/72/824](#), para. 29).**

Protection of victims

19. The report of the Secretary-General provides details about the activities of the Victims' Rights Advocate in mainstreaming a system-wide focus on victims' rights and dignity through advocacy and consultation with Member States, the United Nations system and other intergovernmental entities and civil society (A/73/744, paras. 22–27). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that good practices addressing the issue of stigmatization of victims, as well as those addressing intimidation and reprisals, have been developed in different workstreams, and are being adapted to address the particular needs of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

20. The report indicates that the resident coordinators have clear roles and responsibilities in reviewing the coordination structures and activities on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and engaging with the Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate in their implementation. The report also provides information on the expansion of the mapping of victims' rights and approaches to strengthen inter-agency cooperation on country-level victim assistance, as well as the ongoing role of the Special Coordinator in ensuring continued progress in addressing cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (A/73/744, paras. 76–78).

21. With respect to the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, established in 2016, the Secretary-General indicates that in 2018, the trust fund held over \$2 million, including approximately \$400,000 attributable to payments withheld in substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with General Assembly resolution 70/286. The Secretary-General indicates that three projects providing services to victims commenced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018 and three projects on education and livelihood support were initiated in Liberia. Two projects providing access to legal services, psychosocial and medical support in the Central African Republic were also approved. In addition, six project proposals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are under review and other proposals are being developed in the Central African Republic and South Sudan (A/73/744, para. 38). Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as at 28 February 2019, \$1.3 million had been committed for the implementation of projects supported by the trust fund, leaving a balance of \$723,982. The Committee was further informed that the trust fund provides funding for specialized services for victims in a number of locations, based on their identified needs, and that such services are designed to promote self-sustainability. **The Advisory Committee encourages the Secretary-General to undertake further efforts to secure contributions to the trust fund.**

IV. Conclusion

22. **Subject to its comments and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**