

**United States Remarks for the
UNICEF Executive Board Annual Session
June 1-4, 2021**

Item 11: Update on implementation of PSEA recommendations

We note the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed regarding UNICEF's efforts in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. We recognize UNICEF's efforts in scaling up its work on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in its COVID-19 response in 91 countries and its leadership in developing technical guidance on addressing those risks in the emergency response to the pandemic at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

While we take note of the decline in sexual harassment reports since 2019, we caution that SEA is consistently underreported, and an absence of reported cases should not be seen as an absence of incidents. We also note that the global pandemic may have compromised survivors' ability to safely report. Despite increased efforts, we know that we are still not yet where we need to be on this issue, and the aid community cannot abdicate its responsibility to address and mitigate SEA from the earliest and most acute stages of any response, with zero tolerance for inaction to address allegations.

We commend UNICEF's decision to adhere to the OECD-DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance. This demonstrates an important step towards greater accountability to beneficiaries and the assistance community, and we look forward to evidence of this accountability at the country level as well.

In this regard, the United States strongly encourages UNICEF to forge closer partnerships with other UN development system agencies and Resident Coordinators in the new UN country team setting. It will be important for UNICEF to take advantage of its mandate and comparative advantage to find solutions across sectors to achieve the outcomes and results of the Strategic Plan.

UNICEF has been a leader in the UN in addressing these serious issues and we are encouraged by UNICEF's efforts to create an organizational culture of zero tolerance and its coordination with other UN agencies. As recent allegations from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have shown, collective action is vital to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and in ensuring accountability exists across the aid sector. Both member states and the UN have a responsibility to do more to ensure organizations take concrete steps to strengthen and improve implementation of prevention and response policies, develop strategies to address underreporting, and ensure effective follow-up and review of allegations including through safe, appropriate and survivor-centered investigations.

While UNICEF has made demonstrable progress in implementing the recommendations from the Independent Task Force report, more needs to be done to address underlying drivers of sexual exploitation and abuse. As UNICEF noted in its progress report, these drivers include gender inequality and discrimination and gender-based violence. Sustained engagement, SEA risk

analysis, and meaningful risk mitigation measures will be critical to maintain and build upon progress made so far, as will addressing reports promptly, comprehensively, and systematically when they occur.

We urge UNICEF to include PSEA and sexual harassment indicators in the new Strategic Plan and further welcome information on any lessons that can be drawn from recent learning from DRC and from the UNICEF's ongoing Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment and preliminary findings. We recommend UNICEF to use these lessons learned to inform efforts to address systems-level change across all contexts and responses.