

Note to Correspondents

At the UN system Chief Executives Board meeting in London, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres led a special session on addressing sexual harassment within the organizations of the United Nations system.

He reiterated that he was seriously concerned by all allegations of sexual harassment at the United Nations and has made addressing this issue a top priority.

Harassment of any kind offends the principles of what we stand for as an organization and undermines our core values and our work, he told the Chief Executives Board, composed of 31 Chief Executives of UN agencies, Funds and Programmes. He emphasized, once again, that sexual harassment has no place in the United Nations system and restated his personal commitment to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.

The UN leaders engaged with the Secretary-General on a number of initiatives designed to urgently address this challenging issue across the UN family of organizations.

Addressing the issue means making sure all staff – both those affected and those who witness harassment – know what to do and where to go. The Secretary-General has taken steps to boost support for victims, to enhance the protection of whistleblowers and to improve reporting and investigation of allegations.

Sexual harassment, like sexual abuse and sexual violence, is rooted in historic power imbalances and the male-dominated culture that permeates governments, the private sector, international organizations and even areas of civil society. This creates obstacles to upholding zero tolerance policies. To change this dynamic, the Secretary-General is putting greater power into the hands of women throughout the United Nations. Through his direct appointments, he has been able to reach gender parity in the Senior Management Group. He is keen to see progress in other areas.

The Secretary-General calls on leaders and staff across the UN system to join him in driving cultural change to ensure a workplace where sexual harassment is never tolerated, abusers are held accountable and staff feel safe to report incidents.

UN personnel and the general public should expect the highest standards of the UN. Leaders of the United Nations system are determined to ensure these are upheld.

In conclusion of the session, the Board issued the following statement:

CEB Statement on Addressing Sexual Harassment within the Organizations of the UN System

Sexual harassment results from a culture of discrimination and privilege, based on unequal gender relations and power dynamics. It has no place in the United Nations system.

Leaders of UN System organizations reiterate their firm commitment to uphold a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment; to strengthen victim-centred prevention and response efforts; and to foster a safe and inclusive working environment.

The members of the CEB are driving action in three key areas:

Reporting:

- Providing mechanisms such as 24-hour helplines for staff to report harassment and access support
- Establishing a system-wide database to avoid rehire of individuals who have perpetrated sexual harassment

Investigation and decision-making

- Instituting fast track procedures to receive, process and address complaints
- Recruiting specialized investigators, including women

Outreach and support

- Mandatory training; providing guides for managers; harmonizing policies
- Launching staff perception surveys to learn from experiences

We will continue to work on changing the culture of our organizations. The United Nations must be a place where staff are valued and empowered to speak up and where sexual harassment is never tolerated.