PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The following are extracts from the policy on the prevention of sexual harassment adopted by the executive heads of all organizations of the United Nations common system.

1. The organizations of the United Nations common system have an obligation to ensure that the highest standards of conduct are met at all times. The organizations are also responsible for making clear that behaviour which is not in keeping with these standards will not be tolerated.

2. Every staff member shall have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, free from abuse or harassment.

3. Within this framework, the common system organizations will not tolerate any type of harassment, particularly sexual harassment, within the workplace or associated with work performed on behalf of the organization. Conduct which is determined to constitute sexual harassment will be subject to appropriate administrative or disciplinary action.

What is sexual harassment?

4. Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. In all cases it refers to conduct that is unwanted by the recipient.
5. When behaviour of this kind is engaged in by any official who is in a position to influence career or employment conditions (including hiring, assignment, contract renewal, performance evaluation or promotion) of the recipient of such attentions, it also constitutes an abuse of power.

6. Three categories of conduct are generally considered to be covered by this definition.

"**Physical conduct of a sexual nature** which is commonly regarded as meaning unwanted physical contact ranging from unnecessary touching, patting or pinching or brushing against another employee's body to assault and coercing sexual intercourse."

"**Verbal conduct of a sexual nature** which may include unwelcome sexual advances, propositions or pressure for sexual activity; continued suggestions for social activity outside the workplace after it has been made clear that such suggestions are unwelcome; offensive flirtations; suggestive remarks, innuendoes or lewd comments."

"**Non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature** which refers to the display of pornographic or sexually-suggestive pictures, objects of written materials; leering, whistling, or making sexually-suggestive gestures."
7. Staff shall be free to refuse such conduct or advances without negative consequences or retaliatory action resulting therefrom.

8. Sexual harassment is distinguished from other forms of mutual contact by its unwelcome, unreciprocated and imposed nature. Mutually acceptable behaviour is not sexual harassment regardless of the employment relationship.

**What this means in practice**

9. All staff bear responsibility for the maintenance of a harmonious working environment; this implies that, in accordance with the standards of conduct of the international civil service and the staff rules, they shall conduct themselves in a way which will ensure that the workplace is free of intimidation, hostility or offence and, in this context, of any form of sexual harassment. Managers should make this clear (a) by their example, (b) by clearly communicating to all their staff the policy outlined in this statement, (c) by enhancing a positive working environment in which sexual harassment does not occur and (d) by ensuring prompt attention to the adherence to the policy.
10. All employees are equally responsible, however, for complying with this policy and for helping to create a working environment in which dignity is fully respected.

11. Staff members who believe they are being sexually harassed should immediately inform the alleged harasser of the unwelcome nature of his or her behaviour and express their expectation that it will cease. In the event that the offensive behaviour does not cease, or where the circumstances are such that it is too difficult for the staff member to approach the alleged harasser directly, both informal and formal means of resolving the problem may be tried. The Personnel Departments of individual organizations can be contacted for details. In all cases, however, it has been agreed that all allegations of sexual harassment will be fully, fairly and promptly investigated and dealt with in a confidential manner. Any retaliation or threat of retaliation against individuals making formal or informal sexual harassment complaints or assisting in the investigation of complaints will be considered as a violation of standards of conduct and will result in severe disciplinary action.
For further information about this policy, contact the secretariat of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Telephone: 917 3276