

Use political weight to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse, UN official urges global leaders

17 September 2017 – Ahead of a high-level United Nations meeting on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, the Organization's Special Coordinator on the issue is urging global leaders to join the "Circle of Leadership," lend the political weight of their offices, and act both at the national and international levels to eradicate the scourge.

Sexual exploitation and abuse is not an issue that is only concerning peacekeeping or military or uniformed personnel, it is a scourge that exists everywhere across our system," Jane Holl Lute, the [Special Coordinator on improving the UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse](#), said in an interview with *UN News*.

Through this initiative [we are] asking political leadership, to personally, associate with this agenda and lend the political weight of their office to its success."

The [High-level Meeting on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), to be held on Monday at UN Headquarters on the eve of the high-level segment of the General Assembly's 72nd session, will see [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres announce the *Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in UN operations*. The Circle will comprise Heads of State and Government committed to ending impunity and strengthening measures to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in international deployments.

UN chief's priority since assuming office

Combatting the scourge is one of the key priorities for Mr. Guterres, who since being elected to the position took a number of steps to stomp it out. In his first week in office, the UN chief established a special task force to look at the issue and to recommend concrete actions.

The matter was also the subject of his [first report to UN Member States](#) in March this year, in which, among other matters, he called for the High-level Meeting to make a political demonstration of solidarity with the Organization's efforts to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse.

He also called for a system-wide Victims' Rights Advocate, who will stand for the rights and dignity of victims alongside their need for assistance and attention in the wake of allegations and abuse.

The meeting will also [introduce Jane Connors](#), the Victims' Rights Advocate, who was appointed last month.

It will also present the state of the Secretary-General's Trust Fund for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and make an appeal for additional contributions, and we will also update Member States on the state of the compacts between them and the UN on more specific measures to combat sexual exploitation and abuse," added the Special Coordinator.

Indicators of progress

Speaking on progress made in combatting sexual exploitation and abuse, Ms. Lute highlighted the appointment of the Victims' Rights Advocate, as well as practical actions such as the use of a new, uniform information reporting form to consistently collect information, mandatory e-learning course, surveys and increased awareness.

Our systems are beginning to generate the kind of trust that we want them to generate so that people know if they bring an allegation forward, it will be handled discretely, humanely, and that we are seeking the appropriate and rapid justice for victims

But above all, the generation of a "kind of trust" has been a key marker, stressed Ms. Lute.

"On the ground we are seeing a few more cases being reported. We take that as a sign that our systems are beginning to generate the kind of trust that we want them to generate so that people know if they bring an allegation forward, it will be handled discretely, humanely, and that we are seeking the appropriate and rapid justice for victims," she said.

Follow-up after the High-level Meeting

On actions following tomorrow's meeting, Ms. Lute spoke of a follow-on consultation with civil society at which the UN will solicit views on what the Organization needs to do to visibly and tangibly achieve its goals, as well as what support they can provide to the UN.

The Special Coordinator also spoke of the personal commitment of the Secretary-General for the cause and his leadership at the highest level.

"I think it is impossible to find someone in the UN system who does not know about this issue, and does not know about the importance the Secretary-General places on it, we need to translate that knowledge and awareness into action," she underscored.