

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
PRINCIPALS MEETING**

**9 December 2004**

**9.30 – 13.00 hrs**

**Room I, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

**Action to address gender based violence in emergencies:  
IASC Statement of Commitment**

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The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is gravely concerned by the widespread sexual and gender based violence in emergencies. In particular, in conflict situations, rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence are systematically used as a method of war to brutalize and instil fear in the civilian population.

At the same time, recent reports of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse perpetrated by UN peacekeepers and UN civilian staff in the Democratic Republic of the Congo re-emphasize the individual and collective responsibilities for maintaining appropriate conduct and standards of behaviour of humanitarian organisations and peacekeeping forces.

We, the members of the IASC, therefore commit ourselves to urgent and concerted action aimed at preventing sexual and gender based violence and at ensuring appropriate care and follow-up for victims/survivors. In particular, we commit to:

**1. Strengthening prevention measures:** The damaging effects of conflict, such as displacement, the destruction of community structures, poverty and lack of resources increase the risk of sexual and gender based violence. We must reinforce our efforts to ensure the provision of timely and comprehensive assistance and protection, in the full respect of our humanitarian principles, to protect those in need from all forms of sexual and gender based violence. Prevention measures should include:

- Ensuring that our operational implementation prevents putting populations in situations which increase their risk of being victims of sexual and gender based violence;
- Supporting national authorities to ensure effective security for vulnerable populations including policing and deterrence measures;
- Providing training programmes for peacekeepers, police and arms bearers on the prohibition of sexual violence in international legal instruments;
- Further promoting mechanisms to lay the basis for effective administration of justice, including, providing legal counselling and supporting victims to access justice;
- Supporting capacity development and training of national governments, national NGOs and local communities in undertaking preventive measures.

**2. Ensuring implementation of the IASC policy on gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance:** Gender inequality increases the risk of sexual and gender based violence. Addressing gender discrimination, including by ensuring that women and girls become full participants in decision-making, is a critical step towards ending these forms of violence.

**3. Promote compliance to international law and strengthened efforts to address impunity:** In situations of armed conflict, sexual and gender based violence must be seen in the broader context of violence against civilians. We must therefore encourage Governments to comply with the provisions of international law during and after armed conflicts. As perpetrators of sexual violence continue to enjoy near complete impunity, we must also support more decisive action on the part of Governments to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. We also welcome the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and encourage its efforts to ensure meaningful accountability for violence against women and children, in cases where national authorities fail.

**4. Improve reporting and data collection:** Increase capacity to monitor and report on acts of sexual and gender based violence, on the basis of international law, and support mechanism for seeking redress. This will include enhancing cooperation with human rights mechanisms including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, treaty bodies and special procedures, including in particular the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, regional human rights mechanisms and human rights NGOs. Ensure systematic sex- and age- disaggregated data collection and analysis as a basis for developing effective programming as well as monitoring and evaluation.

**5. Provide care and follow up to victims/survivors:** Develop and strengthen programs and services to address the psychological, social and physical consequences of sexual and gender based violence for victims/survivors and to assist in their reintegration into the broader community, including by:

- Providing appropriate psychological and social support to victims/survivors;
- Providing comprehensive and sensitive medical care to victims/survivors, including considering HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) along with voluntary counseling and testing and reproductive health care for victims/survivors of rape.

**6. Addressing continuing problems of sexual abuse and exploitation by personnel responsible for providing assistance and protection to affected populations:** We reaffirm our commitment to the principles and practice outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13). At the same time, we recognise the need to equip SRSGs, UN Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinators and Country Teams in the field with adequate technical assistance and human and financial resources to fulfil their responsibilities towards the implementation of the Bulletin. We also encourage the peacekeeping community to act in accordance with the standards set out in the Bulletin and to take the necessary steps to punish perpetrators and prevent further incidences of sexual exploitation and abuse.

**7. Speaking out against sexual exploitation and gender based violence in emergencies:** We must reinforce efforts to draw attention to the issue and advocate more strongly on behalf of victims.

**8. Developing a comprehensive IASC policy and plan of action on prevention and response on sexual and gender based violence:** Building on existing policies and guidelines, including the IASC Matrix on sexual and gender based violence interventions in emergency settings, promote a coherent and multi-sectoral approach to prevention of and response to sexual and gender based violence at the field level, to include the participation of affected communities, international humanitarian organizations, national NGOs- especially women's NGOs, and host and donor governments.