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**IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in
Humanitarian Crises: Report on the Activities of the Taskforce**

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I. Background:

1. In spring 2002, allegations of widespread sexual exploitation and abuse of refugee and internally displaced women and children by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers in West Africa highlighted the vulnerability of these populations to abuse and exploitation in humanitarian crises, especially the risks faced by women and girls. They also highlighted the apparent failure of the system of protection and monitoring and the lack of avenues for recourse when abuse is threatened or occurs.
2. Acknowledging that the problem was not confined to West Africa, an extraordinary meeting of the Executive Committee of Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) entrusted the IASC to develop remedial measures. A few days later, the IASC Working Group established the Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.¹ The Task Force was mandated to make recommendations aiming to eliminate sexual abuse and exploitation by humanitarian personnel and the misuse of humanitarian assistance, within the overall objective of strengthening and enhancing the protection and care of children and women in situations of humanitarian crisis and conflict. The Task Force identified three major areas of concern: the establishment of common elements of a code of conduct and standards of behaviour for humanitarian workers; mechanisms and capacity for protection against sexual exploitation and abuse; and improved mechanisms for delivering assistance, along with the cross-cutting issues of gender and accountability.
3. The Task Force's Plan of Action was adopted by the IASC in July 2002. In addition to specific preventive and remedial measures, the report established six core principles to be incorporated into the codes of conduct and staff rules and regulations of member organizations. These core principles represent the agreed principles and standards of behaviour that humanitarian agencies – whether UN or non-UN – expect of their staff.
4. For reasons of length, this report does not detail all the work in this area undertaken by the Task Force of the IASC members. Instead, it highlights some of the major achievements and challenges. Specific recommendations for IASC-WG endorsement are also made.

¹ The Task Force is co-chaired by OCHA and UNICEF and comprises WFP, UNHCR, OHCHR, OSRSG/CAAC, IFRC, Interaction, SCHR and UNDP. However, a large number of other humanitarian organisations provide input to the work of the Task Force and it also liaises with DPKO, OHRM and OLA.

II. Implementation of the Plan of Action:

i. Standards of staff behaviour

5. The Co-Chairs have led the drafting process for the forthcoming Secretary-General's Bulletin (SGB) enshrining the IASC-endorsed six core principles on minimum standards of conduct into UN staff rules and regulations, applicable to all UN personnel. The six principles will then represent the minimum standards of behaviour expected of all United Nations civilian staff members. The Bulletin will also require the incorporation of the six principles into contracts with operational partners. The draft Bulletin has already been through the mandatory Staff-Management consultation process, and is currently with the Office of Legal Affairs for final editing.
6. In addition to these efforts, humanitarian agencies within and outside the United Nations system have been engaged in efforts to adopt or revise their own codes of conduct and to require that partners adhere to the 6 core principles. For example, The UNHCR Code of Conduct has been signed by 92% of staff so far, and WFP and UNICEF have included reference to sexual exploitation and abuse in partner agreements. WFP has incorporated the "zero tolerance policy" into its legal framework-i.e.-through staff contracts, and participated in the UNDG working group to adjust the harassment policy in line with sexual abuse and exploitation policies. It appears that within the broader IASC membership most agencies are adopting codes of conduct incorporating the six core principles. (Concerns have been raised that there is a proliferation of different codes of conduct; adoption of the SGB will ameliorate this situation at least within the UN system.)
7. As encouraged by the Plan of Action, various donors (including the US and ECHO) have begun to require formal incorporation of the core principles into their own agreements with operational partners. The Task Force is encouraging other donors to take similar steps, and welcomes in this connection the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship adopted in Stockholm on 17 June 2003.
8. The Task Force is continuing to work on the development of model complaints mechanisms and investigation protocols to be followed in the event of breach of these principles. The Task Force's Code of Conduct sub-group selected consultants from a leading Children's Rights Organization in the UK to develop model complaints mechanisms and investigative protocols for UNICEF. These model complaints mechanisms will be finalized by August 2003 and after review by the Task Force will be disseminated to all IASC members. In addition, IASC members are being consulted in the development of these models. Individual agencies are also developing agency-specific processes, including for example, UNHCR and IRC.

ii. Field implementation

9. All IASC members have disseminated the Plan of Action to their field offices and the document is in the public domain. It is the view of the Task Force that the strongest achievements of the Task Force have been in the areas of widespread dissemination of the code of conduct and training for staff. This was confirmed by the first Mission of the Task Force to Liberia and Sierra Leone in November, 2002.
10. Importantly, two UN peacekeeping missions in Africa – MONUC and UNAMSIL – have incorporated the six core principles into special codes of conduct concerning sexual exploitation and abuse. A Memorandum from SRSG Ngongi entitled "Conduct in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo regarding the prohibition of sexual abuse and/or exploitation by members of the civilian and military components of MONUC” was circulated to all members of MONUC on 16 December 2002. Similarly, a Memorandum from SRSG Adeniji entitled “Prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse by all members of the civilian and military components of UNAMSIL” was circulated on 4 June 2003. The Task Force will continue to work with DPKO to ensure more coherence in approach and widespread adoption of the 6 core principles for a code of conduct.

11. Trainings on sexual exploitation and sexual abuse issues have been conducted by a wide range of IASC members across the world and the Task Force has taken on responsibility for ensuring that relevant training materials are collated and posted on Re ReliefWeb. In responding to the Iraq crisis, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation issues were integrated into the larger protection trainings and most agencies required partners to adopt the six core principles. In addition, there have been several trainings specifically on sexual exploitation and abuse for Iraq and neighboring countries.
12. One particularly interesting initiative took place in Southern Africa. WFP, Save the Children and UNICEF jointly developed training for the Southern Africa region, which included an emphasis on the links between sexual violence and sexual exploitation and HIV. More than 4000 people were trained in total, ranging from commercial operators and program staff to heads of offices. An outside evaluation was done on the effectiveness of the training. Among the conclusions of the report was that the training, while effective, needed to be revised for more senior managers. In addition, further materials needed to be adapted for semi-literate or illiterate participants. This demonstrates the difficulty of developing a “one size fits all” training module; clearly, managerial-level training on these issues requires further thought, and all participating agencies agreed that additional follow up is needed. This initiative also resulted in country-level, inter-agency and inter-organization Task Forces being formed to address this issue more broadly.
13. The Task Force is also working with the Humanitarian Coordinator system to ensure that implementation of the Plan of Action is being pursued in all countries facing humanitarian crises. In November 2002, the Task Force Co-Chair facilitated a session on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse at the Humanitarian Coordinators retreat, with a view to securing increased buy-in from the HCs on implementation and monitoring of the Plan of Action. Unfortunately, due to a heavy agenda, the briefing was fairly short and did not allow enough time for in-depth discussion on the issue.
14. Recently, at the recommendation of the Task Force, the Emergency Relief Coordinator sent a questionnaire to all HCs to better assess the work that has been done. Thus far nine HCs have responded to the questionnaire detailing their implementation efforts to date. From the responses received, it is clear that action is being taken but that it is uneven. Most HCs appear to require more support and guidance to be able to fully implement the Plan of Action. Again, while staff conduct has been adequately addressed in many countries, less attention has been paid to the issue of complaints mechanisms and programming guidance.
15. In Sierra Leone, the national level inter-agency Coordination Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (CCSEA) is in the process of developing an excellent human resources manual covering all relevant human resource issues. This includes recruitment and hiring, monitoring and evaluation of staff and discipline and

termination. This is currently in draft form, but the Task Force hopes that it will have broader dissemination outside the region once finalised.

16. The Task Force will continue to encourage and monitor implementation of Plan of Action, providing guidance to field and agencies, as long as necessary.

iii. Peer review

17. Finally, one interesting initiative that the Task Force would like to bring to the IASC-WG's attention is the pilot peer review initiated by SCHR and partners in January 2003. The pilot is designed to assess implementation of the commitments made in the IASC Plan of Action by reviewing one agency's policies and practice on sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). The agency to be reviewed prepared a memorandum explaining its policies and practices with on these issues. Using the memorandum, a three-day review was conducted by the review team and a total of 27 staff members were interviewed including a number of field offices by conference call. Following the visit, the review team submitted a report to SCHR. The report will be used as the basis for a half-day peer review by SCHR CEOs on 2 July. The pilot will continue with a review of the other two agencies.
18. The Task Force eagerly anticipates the peer review conclusions. At a minimum, the conclusions will provide excellent and very valuable information about challenges and successes in implementation. The IASC may in fact wish to recommend adopting a similar peer review process on a wider basis.

III. Next steps and challenges:

19. The Task Force's aim to move implementation of the Plan of Action to the field by having IASC Country Teams design and implement country-level plans of actions has proven unrealistic. Most IASC country teams have not made significant headway in elaborating shared mechanisms and procedures to protect against sexual exploitation and abuse. In part, this was the result of varying levels of commitment by Humanitarian Coordinators to the issue and lack of clear accountability for implementation. At the same time, the Task Force was not in a position to provide model material and best practice information from efforts in other countries. Systematic monitoring and collating of the various initiatives was hampered by inadequate information-sharing. The Task Force is beginning to address this issue, The forthcoming Task Force mission to Afghanistan (security conditions allowing) will also focus specifically on developing a replicable, field-friendly best practice tool-kit and information package.
20. The Task Force believes that it would be highly productive to integrate plans for specific issues such as the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse into existing planning and reporting instruments such as the HC monthly note to the ERC, the CAP, the UNDAF and the RC Annual Report.
21. While the mandate of the Task Force has been protection from sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in humanitarian crises, the main focus of the Task Force to date has been on preventing sexual abuse and sexual exploitation by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers. This is only one component of the problem, and the task force needs to take on a more active role on preventing and responding to sexual violence in humanitarian crises more generally. For example, the situation of massive sexual violence by armed militias in Eastern DRC warrants action from the Task Force. In addition, while the Task Force is focused on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in humanitarian

crises, the principles in the Plan of Action are applicable to a non humanitarian context as well.

22. Another element in the Plan of Action that remains unfinished is the study looking at the links between underfunding and increased vulnerability to sexual exploitation. As mentioned in the last report, the first mission of the Task Force found that for example, in Sierra Leone and Liberia inadequate levels of humanitarian assistance rendered women extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation. A number of women said that during "week zero"-the week prior to food distribution-trading sex was virtually their only option. This study clearly needs to go forward.

Expected outcome of IASC-WG discussion:

The Task Force proposes the following decision points for IASC-WG consideration:

The IASC-WG recommends a six-month extension of the Task Force's mandate, with a refocused terms of reference:

- To stimulate field implementation, the Task Force will focus on developing a streamlined guidance package including a model code of conduct, beneficiary complaints mechanism, investigatory protocols and a response procedures – building on the work done in the field, at global level and the missions to Sierra Leone and Liberia as well as the forthcoming to Mission to Afghanistan Also in the package will be the newly revised UNHCR Guidelines on SGBV and other relevant materials from IASC members.
- The Task Force will also work with the IASC sub-working group on the CAP and UNDG to ensure that CAP and UNDAF guidelines are adjusted as appropriate to incorporate plans for addressing the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The IASC-WG welcomes the finalisation of the SG's Bulletin, and calls on all individual IASC members (members, standing invitees, etc) to adopt the six core principles verbatim into their codes of conduct, and to report back at the next meeting on this issue.

The IASC-WG decides to consider the implications of revising the HC terms of reference to include accountability for implementing crisis-specific elements of the IASC Plan of Action, including monitoring adherence to the six core principles.

The IASC-WG calls on OCHA to amend the HC monthly reporting requirements to the ERC to include a requirement to report on protection from sexual exploitation issues and implementation of the Plan of Action.

The IASC-WG calls on OCHA to adjust future country and regional trainings on Protection of Civilians to include an element on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The IASC-WG calls for the inclusion of training/briefing on sexual exploitation and abuse at the annual Humanitarian Coordinators meeting.

The IASC-WG urges UNDG to incorporate training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse into its RC induction courses and to require reporting on

protection from sexual exploitation and abuse issues in the annual RC reports, where appropriate.

The IASC-WG refers the Plan of Action to the Sub-Working Group on the CAP and calls on the SWG to work with the Task Force to incorporate relevant elements into CAP guidelines, as well as to explore, with UNDG, the feasibility of incorporating relevant elements into UNDAF guidelines.

The IASC-WG resolves to more actively mainstream the work of this task force into other entities including the IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, and IASC Task Force on HIV/AIDS in Emergency Settings

The IASC-WG requests the Task Force to review the findings of the SCHR pilot peer review and make recommendations to the next WG meeting on the feasibility of broader implementation of a similar peer review process.

The IASC-WG resolves to consider the development of a common humanitarian code of conduct covering issues broader than sexual abuse and exploitation and appropriate mechanisms for beneficiary recourse for violations of these.

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Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises