

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE-WORKING GROUP  
51st MEETING**

**25-26 November 2002**

**WHO Headquarters, Geneva  
Room M505**

**Agenda Item: Update on IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation  
and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis**

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**Summary of activities of Task Force:**

- a. Task Force established March 2002.
- b. Completion of Task Force Report and Plan of Action (June 2002) elaborating recommendations aiming to prevent sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in humanitarian crises, with an emphasis on prevention of sexual exploitation by humanitarian personnel and the misuse of humanitarian assistance for purposes of sexual exploitation.
- c. Adoption by IASC Plenary of Plan of Action (July 2002).
- d. Plan of Action implementation phase (August 2002-present): Plan disseminated to all agencies and field offices for implementation; five small inter-agency task teams have been formed to provide specific guidelines and best practice for agencies and country teams on: code of conduct implementation including complaints mechanism for staff and gender and age-sensitive investigative protocols, training, distribution mechanisms and beneficiary awareness, beneficiary recourse mechanisms, and protection benchmarks.
- e. First of three/four planned Task Force field missions took place in October 2002. The aim of the missions is to determine to what extent models already developed in the field may be applied elsewhere, to monitor implementation of the Plan of Action and to provide guidance to the field on key issues.
- f. Ongoing involvement in drafting process for Secretary-General's Bulletin (SGB) enshrining IASC-endorsed six core principles on minimum standards of conduct into UN staff rules and regulations, applicable to all UN personnel.
- g. Task Force involved (including through development of media strategy) in preparations for release of OIOS investigation report into West Africa allegations and of SG's report to Security Council on women, peace and security.
- h. Task Force Co-Chair will facilitate a session on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse at the Humanitarian Coordinators retreat in late November, with a view to securing buy-in from the HCs on implementation and monitoring of the Plan of Action.
- i. Task Force will continue to encourage and monitor implementation of Plan of Action, providing guidance to field and agencies, as long as necessary.

(Activities *b*, *c* and *g* represent fulfilment of the initial outputs as set out in the Task Force's terms of reference).

### **Codes of conduct**

1. The Plan of Action on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises established the six core principles representing minimum standards of behavior, to be incorporated into the codes of conduct and staff rules and regulations of all member organizations.
2. While the Office of Legal Affairs has advised that the six core principles fall within the existing United Nations Code of Conduct and Staff Rules and Regulations and will not necessitate a formal change to these Rules and Regulations, it is proposed that a Secretary-General's Bulletin be issued to further clarify the obligations of UN staff in this regard. A draft prepared by OLA has been circulated for comment to all IASC members, as well as other interested Secretariat departments such as OHRM and DPKO. It is expected that a revised final draft, incorporating relevant comments, will be sent by the Task Force to OLA for clearance before submission to the mandatory staff-management consultation process in the coming weeks.
3. The six principles will then represent the minimum standards of behaviour expected of all United Nations civilian staff members. Each UN agency is free to develop their own internal codes of conduct establishing higher standards for their organization. It is expected that the Bulletin will also encourage or require the incorporation of the six principles into contracts with operational partners. In addition, humanitarian agencies outside the United Nations system are engaged in similar efforts to adopt or revise their own codes of conduct.
4. Donors and other Member States have expressed general agreement with the core principles for codes of conduct. The United States Government has already formally adopted a policy requiring incorporation of the core principles into their own agreements with operational partners as is encouraged by the Plan of Action. The Task Force is encouraging other donors to take similar steps.
5. The Task Force is continuing to work with OHRM regarding the appropriate disciplinary procedures to be followed in the event of breach of these principles. Existing procedures can often be used as the bases to address such transgressions. However, the Task Force is working to ensure that there are clear age and gender sensitive investigative protocols and complaints mechanisms in place for sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. These efforts are being complemented by developing clear reporting lines for staff when exploitation and abuse occur and establishing appropriate mechanisms for recourse by beneficiaries.

### **Implementation of other elements of Plan of Action**

6. The Plan of Action also details a number of specific measures to be taken both by IASC member agencies and by country teams in the field. Through individual agency efforts, and the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) system, implementation of the Plan of Action is now being pursued in all countries facing humanitarian crises. A major step in ensuring commitment of the HCs will be the forthcoming HC retreat, at which a session has been scheduled on protection

from sexual exploitation and abuse. The Task Force will continue to serve as an advisory and sounding board to the HCs in their implementation efforts. Measures that are being or will be implemented include enhanced training of humanitarian staff working in emergency situations; programs for raising awareness among communities; establishing committees of women among refugee populations to give the population most at risk a role in their own protection. Agencies are also reviewing aid delivery systems, including involving more women in the distribution of aid.

7. The Task Force's first field mission was undertaken in October 2002 to Sierra Leone and Liberia. These two countries were chosen because, since the publication of the initial report, they had been at the center of the international response. Thus it was felt that the Task Force could learn much that could be shared with other countries.

The mission included representatives from UNICEF, OCHA, WFP, UNHCR and Christian Children's Fund (representing InterAction). In both countries the mission met with UN agencies, NGOs and Government representatives and made visits to camps for refugees and IDPs.

The mission found that Liberia and Sierra Leone face different though very challenging situations. Sierra Leone is perceived to be moving towards stability following years of brutal conflict, although humanitarian programmes, particularly in the area of refugee protection are severely affected by the UNHCR funding crises. Liberia is in deep crisis with renewed fighting, increasing levels of displacement, massive violations of human rights, a ruined economy and corruption creating misery for the vast majority of the population.

Key findings from the visits:

1. There is an improved awareness of sexual abuse and exploitation amongst the humanitarian community. The "core principles" of the IASC Task Force are widely known and, in both countries visited, country or agency specific codes of conduct exist. This reflects on a lot of work by many individuals and agencies. However, more needs to be done to ensure greater consistency of awareness and understanding.
2. Progress has been made in the identification of vulnerabilities but more could be done. The situation of female-headed households is particularly troubling.
3. Camp management was identified as crucial for the effective co-ordination and integration of services for the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation. Good camp management is essential if SGBV programs move from being an add-on to an integral part of humanitarian protection. Improved guidelines are required for this to happen.
4. In neither country are there yet effective complaints mechanisms or systems for measuring the incidence of sexual abuse and exploitation amongst refugee and displaced populations. More work is needed at global level to provide guidance to agencies working at field level on this issue.
5. The economic status of affected populations is crucial. The Task Force found that in both countries visited, inadequate levels of humanitarian assistance rendered many women extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation and transactional sex. A number admitted that, during "week zero" - the week prior to a food distribution - transactional sex

was virtually their only option. The mission remained extremely concerned at inadequate levels of donor support to humanitarian agencies operating in both countries.

6. In both countries, inadequacies in legal protection, and weak or non-existent police forces and judicial systems mean that there is little real prospect of legal accountability.

These and other insights were of enormous importance to the Task Force as it seeks to oversee and support implementation of the plan of action and ensure its relevance to the reality of the ground. Two to three further missions will take place in 2003, with a primary focus on monitoring implementation of the Plan of Action and providing guidance to the field on key issues.

### **Media strategy**

8. In preparation for the release of the report of the OIOS investigation into the allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation emerging from West the Task Force revitalized its Communications Sub-Group in order to prepare a common media strategy to deal with the media interest in the issue. Extensive liaison between the Co-Chairs, OIOS, the Secretary-General's Office and the Communications Sub-Group resulted in all parties being prepared for the release of the report, with background materials summarizing preventive and remedial measures to date being made available. The Emergency Relief Coordinator spoke on the work of the Task Force at the press conference at which the OIOS report was released.

### **Constraints and challenges**

9. As is common with many inter-agency endeavors, the number of actors involved in this issue has at times posed difficulties. Bringing members of the Task Force together for regular teleconferences, securing consensus on next steps and required decisions, and ensuring follow up by individual agencies/task team chairs designated to follow certain issues has proven consistently challenging. In light of these constraints, and in order to secure progress, both UNICEF and OCHA have dedicated one full-time staff member at the working level to work on Task Force issues. Despite the obvious commitment of many Task Force members, patchy progress on some issues reflects the fact that not all agencies are able to devote as much time and thought as would be optimal to this matter. In addition, the release of the OIOS report finding that sexual exploitation by aid workers, while clearly a problem, was not "widespread" poses a challenge to the Task Force to keep this issue on the humanitarian agenda and to ensure that all members of the humanitarian and peacekeeping community continue to address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation as an urgent priority. Reports from other regions of the world, as well as West Africa, of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in situations of humanitarian crises, continue to emerge.

### **Areas requiring support from the IASC Working Group**

10. Members of the IASC Working Group will be required to commit to implementation of aspects of the Plan of Action which require follow up at the individual agency level, and to report back to the Working Group on progress to date.

### **Next steps and program of work for 2003**

11. As can be seen from the above, the Task Force has much work ahead in monitoring and guiding the implementation process of the ambitious Plan of Action. This will include

Background document : Report of the Taskforce on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis

shepherding the drafting process for the Secretary-General's Bulletin and engaging donors and non-UN partners on the core principles to ensure widespread application of the same to codes of conduct. A more detailed Terms of Reference for the Task Force in 2003 will be drawn up in the coming weeks.

The Co-Chairs  
11 November 2002

**Proposed Action/Decision required by the IASC-WG**

- To encourage Members of the IASC WG to commit to the implementation of aspects of the Plan of Action, which require follow up at the individual agency level and to report back to the IASC WG on progress to date.