

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE**

**DEPUTIES FORUM**

**SUMMARY RECORD AND ACTION POINTS**

**17 November 2021**

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator (DERC) a.i, and Chair of the IASC Deputies Forum, convened the meeting to discuss the independent review on the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse/sexual harassment (PSEA/SH); and IASC views on the recommendation for an independent review of the humanitarian system in the context of internal displacement emanating from the report of the High-Level Panel on internal displacement.

**Session 1: Independent Review of PSEA/SH**

The Chair noted that the IASC had individually and collectively invested activities and programmes to bolster prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse, and yet cases continue to be reported, often in the media first. It was timely that UNFPA, as part of its Championship on PSEA/SH, sponsored this review. The Chair recalled that following the reporting on Oxfam in Haiti in 2018, the IASC undertook a new strategy and reinvigorated IASC Championship actions. The current independent review offered a rare opportunity to examine whether and how humanitarian partners upheld the stated commitments to PSEA over the years and it would assist with renewed determination and direction, which the Principals would consider next week.

The Chair thanked Deputies for their continued engagement and commitment to addressing sexual misconduct. He stressed that the issue touches at the heart of what humanitarian leaders aspired to be, and on the imperative for the IASC to promote a safe working environment for all aid workers and to ensure humanitarian aid is appropriate, effective, and includes the voices of the communities. He acknowledged the engagement of PSEA focal points, which showed the commitment of IASC partners, including through the various efforts in and support in taking forward recommendations. He welcomed UNFPA for shepherding the IASC review as part of their Championship.

**Introduction**

Mr. Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, introduced the review recommendations and the Roundtable planned for 23 November. Both of these are key activities of UNFPA's IASC Championship PSEAH, which includes development of a roster of PSEA coordinators, training GBV experts on PSEA case referrals, and an advocacy campaign promoting PSEA in more than 35 countries, reaching a million people.

Mr. Petersen noted that as it had been ten years since the last review, this was an opportune moment to review IASC policies. The current review was undertaken by an independent

consultant but guided by an Advisory Group. The review was not an evaluation, nor did it focus on individual entities. He noted the IASC does not need to agree with all recommendations but should prioritise those it wishes to take forward. Preliminary findings had been shared by the UNFPA Executive Director at the Humanitarian Coordinators Retreat and the IASC Principals meeting in October. Extensive comments had been received on previous versions. He thanked colleagues who contributed to the report and whose feedback had been considered in the Executive Summary and recommendations.

Mr. Petersen elaborated that the review findings were across four thematic areas: victim centred approach, community engagement, leadership and accountability, and sexual harassment. The review identified positive developments, including that the IASC had consistently engaged on PSEAH, and also identified areas where the IASC could do better. Mr. Peterson noted the structure of the IASC roundtable on 23 November would begin with a closed-door session with the Principals. More time may be needed to look at the recommendations, but this should be a first discussion to set direction. It would be useful for Principals to get a clear signal that action is needed, and a timetable to follow up. He proposed additional follow up could be scheduled in 2022. Mr. Petersen added that external partners would be invited to an open session, a short brief of the External Review would feature, but would not be the main focus. Only a short summary of the findings of the Review would be presented. Achievements of the IASC Champion will be presented and identified actions for the next Champion.

The Chair reiterated that the review was not an evaluation and did not assign responsibility for actions. If desired, the IASC could commission an Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation should there be a need for more rigorous findings. Despite investments over the past three years, there was still a lot to do and there was value to look at what could be done collectively.

## **Discussion**

Members thanked UNFPA for their leadership and welcomed the review as providing important recommendations to strengthen their own policies and approaches, particularly as their governing bodies and donors were keen to see improvements in PSEA/SH. Members appreciated the review's emphasis on the importance of organizational culture and a victim centered approach.

Dedicated and predictable funding for PSEA actions was raised as a recommendation that merits further discussion with resource partners, and consideration of how this could be implemented, for example through a one percent levy on all Humanitarian Response Plans. The recommendation to strengthen inter-agency complaint mechanisms was welcomed, although it would require the cooperation and commitment to work together at country level to ensure its success. It would be useful to better understand whether current guidance was being implemented, and if not, what were the barriers. Members also called for a more evidence-based, inclusive and transparent process on taking forward recommendations.

Several members expressed concern that the review contained factual inaccuracies or misrepresented what had been achieved. While not all recommendations need to be accepted, there was trepidation that as the review will be publicly available, it would receive attention from donors, board members, and the media. In addition, it was felt that the report did not emphasise enough the human rights of victims. Members asked to focus on substance and operational delivery and whether there would be an opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies in the full report before it is finalised.

Members requested support on operational delivery of PSEA/SH at the field level given the difference in capacities and implementation, particularly how to engage with teams at country level to help with the desired shift in culture and mindset. Several members emphasized that it would be useful to focus on positive actions and how to constructively commit to tangible actions. Additional recommendations raised included ensuring that PSEA is integrated at the outset of new or deteriorating crises through IASC Scale-Up procedures and that PSEA be considered an operational risk at the same level as security considerations. There was consternation that agencies appeared focused on their own PSEA work rather than the collective, and a recommendation to reflect on why this is the case and what needs to be changed. Members requested that the review look beyond sexual harassment and address hierarchical workplace culture and ensure that it reflects how to work better collectively, including with national partners. The need for better monitoring and compliance was raised, as well as resourcing investigative capacity, legal assistance to victims and stronger engagement with member states. More efforts to screen candidates should also be prioritized. Given the range of recommendations, the focus should be on strategic action.

Mr. Petersen noted that while factual inaccuracies need to be corrected, the review was the work of an independent consultant, not a negotiated document, and as such Deputies were not expected to agree on all recommendations. He reiterated that Member States would be briefed on the findings but would not be given the report at this stage. UNFPA would send out a note to provide clarity on the desired operational follow up to the outcomes of the roundtable.

The Chair concluded the discussion by noting that the report would not be shared with donors or external actors at this point as it would be important to review the Report to not misrepresent achievements. It was agreed that the focus should be on the field, supporting operations with the requisite resources to tackle PSEA. Given the importance, attention, and opportunity to augment collective actions, the Chair stressed the need to focus on positive actions to be taken forward collectively and to prioritize actionable recommendations. The Chair also noted that despite investment in the field, it was still a challenge to foster greater trust, and to ensure we are getting reports from communities. He recommended that attention be brought to bear on this in other places where the IASC sought to foster greater diversity, for example how to bring women's groups into humanitarian decision making.

### **Conclusions and Follow-up Actions:**

1. Update the external PSEA review to reflect feedback received from the Deputies prior to finalizing and publishing the document - including to correct factual inaccuracies and strengthening findings/recommendations to address systemic and operational issues for field impact. **[UNFPA and IASC Secretariat with inputs from members]**
2. Identify priority recommendations to take forward and draw a clear plan of action to do so for consideration of the IASC Principals. **[Deputies Forum with the support of the IASC secretariat]**

## **Session 2: IASC views on the recommendations of the report of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement**

The Chair recalled the initial discussion held by Deputies last month on the High-level Panel's recommendation for an independent review of the humanitarian system to further strengthen the IASC's response in contexts of internal displacement. The Chair welcomed the proposal by the members to move forward with this review, noting that it would be proposed as part of the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda, and sought the Deputies' views on a number of issues, namely: the scope of such a review and as well as its oversight; focusing the review on the elements of the humanitarian system that such a review should aim at safeguarding and strengthening; focusing the review on the humanitarian systems response to IDPs while examining collaboration with development actors around internal displacement and solutions. In addition to the scope of the review, the Chair welcomed further thoughts on the potential timeline and whether external funding for this exercise could be sought from donors.

### **Discussion**

Members welcomed calls for a review of the humanitarian system to further strengthen the IASC's response in contexts of internal displacements. They reiterated the importance of the IASC facilitating this independent review and ensuring that it is commissioned and implemented during the course of 2022. They called for a focused scope of the review to consider the humanitarian response to IDPs, particularly around coordination mechanisms and leadership. Furthermore, they noted the importance of clearly communicating the scope widely to partners.

A number of members also underscored the need for the review to closely consider coordination of internal displacement structures in mixed movement settings, the role of IDPs themselves as well as that of Member States - particularly IDP-hosting Governments and communities. Members added that it was equally important to consider the role of humanitarian actors in engaging with non-state armed groups on displacement as well as the rural dimension of internal displacement, particularly the displacement drivers faced by IDPs requiring support for rural areas, which in the view of some members was underestimated in the IDP HLP report. Several members also underscored the importance of giving due consideration to the needs of different affected populations, including those environmentally displaced; the need for a strong gender lens throughout the review; and the need to consult with existing platforms such as the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, as they have access to a wide range of actors.

Several members noted that, while stepped up efforts were needed to strengthen engagement and collaboration with key actors, particularly development and peacebuilding actors, they underscored the importance of maintaining the focus of the review on the humanitarian system and not embark on a "nexus" review. Members also emphasized the importance of avoiding the fragmentation in the follow-up to the recommendation of the IDP HLP by suggesting that the IASC and UNSDG engage closely on how to take the UN Secretary-General's action plan forward, also in terms of sequencing. Several members, though welcoming the UN Executive Committee (EC) Group consultations, noted the need to exchange regularly on this important issue at the Deputies Forum to ensure the views of non-UN members of the IASC were taken into account in EC discussions. Members proposed that Deputies Forum should act as the governance structure for the review while noting that funding for the review would benefit from the immense interest among donors on this issue.

## Conclusions and Follow-up Action Points:

1. Draft a concept note and terms of reference to carry out an independent review of the humanitarian system to further strengthen the quality of the IASC response in contexts of internal displacement. **[OCHA]**
2. Reflect in the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan the views of the IASC regarding the recommendations of the High-Level Panel's report, including the need for an independent review. **[OCHA]**

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## List of Participants

1. Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator a.i
2. Mr. Laurent Thomas, Deputy Director-General, **FAO**
3. Ms. Anna Chiapello, Diplomatic Adviser, UN Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy Division, **ICRC**
4. Ms. Mirela Shuteriqi, Director of Policy, **ICVA**
5. Mr. Julien Schopp, Vice President, Humanitarian Policy and Practice, **InterAction**
6. Mr. Jeff Labovitz, Director, Department of Operations and Emergencies, **IOM**
7. Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner, **OHCHR**
8. Mr. Gareth Price Jones, Executive Secretary, **SCHR**
9. Mr. Justin Byworth, Global Lead – Disaster Management, **SCHR-World Vision**
10. Ms. Lydia Zigomo, Global Programs Director, **SCHR-Oxfam International**
11. Mr. Justin Byworth, Global Lead – Disaster Management, **SCHR-World Vision**
12. Ms. Asako Okai, Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator and Director of the Crisis Response Unit, **UNDP**
13. Mr. Ib Petersen, Deputy Executive Director, **UNFPA**
14. Mr. Rafael Tuts, Director Global Solutions Division, **UN-Habitat**
15. Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner, **UNHCR**
16. Ms. Meritxell Relano Deputy Director, Office of Emergency Operations, Geneva, **UNICEF**
17. Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, **WHO**
18. Ms. Maria Dimitriadou, Special Representative to the UN and WTO for the Geneva Office, **World Bank**
19. Ms. Mervat Shelbaya, Head, **IASC secretariat**