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**Action by UN-Habitat to strengthen protection against sexual  
and any other type of exploitation and abuse and against  
sexual harassment in the workplace**

## **Action by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme to strengthen protection against sexual and any other type of exploitation and abuse and against sexual harassment in the workplace**

### **Report of the Executive Director**

1. In paragraph 4 (e) of decision 2019/4, the Executive Board of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) decided to consider, at its first session each year, an annual report on actions taken by UN-Habitat to strengthen protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and against sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as any other kind of exploitation or abuse.
2. Recognizing the importance of transparency and accountability in the United Nations system with respect to combating sexual exploitation and abuse, since January 2018, the Secretary-General has requested members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination to certify annually to their governing bodies, through a management letter, that they have: (a) fully and accurately reported all credible allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse related to United Nations staff and affiliated personnel serving in their organization; and (b) made training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse available to their staff and affiliated personnel. The Secretary-General has also requested that heads of entities provide information on how their organization ensures that its implementing partners have minimum standards in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.
3. Accordingly, the management letter from the Executive Director of UN-Habitat covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023 is set out in the annex to the present report for consideration by the Executive Board at its first session of 2024. The management letter has also been shared with the Secretary-General.
4. In accordance with the priorities of the Secretary-General, the management letter certifies that UN-Habitat has acted on and fully and accurately reported all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse related to UN-Habitat staff and affiliated personnel serving in the organization, made training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse available to UN-Habitat staff and affiliated personnel, and taken all necessary actions aimed at strengthening protection from and reporting of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

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\* HSP/EB.2024/1.

5. As part of its efforts to strengthen protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, and against sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as any other kind of exploitation or abuse, UN-Habitat has done the following:

(a) Put in place proactive follow-up mechanisms and processes to ensure that every reported victim has received – with their consent – assistance and support, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel;

(b) Ensured accountability through prompt reporting, timely and victim-centred assessment, and investigation of all allegations that it has received, as part of its commitment to ending impunity. Where an allegation has been substantiated, UN-Habitat has ensured that the matter has been addressed consistently and in accordance with the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and administrative issuances;

(c) Appointed focal points on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse at UN-Habitat headquarters and conducted awareness-raising activities, on a proactive basis, for its staff members and related personnel regarding the prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse and ways of reporting allegations of such acts. At the time of drafting the present report, 82 per cent of UN-Habitat staff members and related personnel had completed induction or refresher training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and had been reminded of their individual obligation to report any such incidents;

(d) Communicated and advocated actively and continuously on issues relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, engaged in outreach efforts to raise awareness of measures of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, and implemented effective ways of reporting allegations of such acts;

(e) Reinforced its efforts to manage risks related to sexual exploitation and abuse when establishing funded partnerships. Currently, UN-Habitat in its various legal instruments is requiring its civil society organization partners and other implementing partners to implement minimum standards and adopt policies to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as assessing them on their capacity to do so;

(f) Reaffirmed that all its cooperation agreements with its implementing partners incorporate conditions relating to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, thereby obligating implementing partners to take all appropriate measures relating to sexual exploitation and abuse committed by any of its employees or any other persons who may be engaged by the implementing partner to perform services under the respective cooperation agreements between UN-Habitat and the implementing partner;

(g) Completed the annual action plan to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse and conducted appropriate risk assessments for each of its operations and programmes; acted on the results of those risk assessments; and continued to review those results on an ongoing basis;

(h) Committed itself to implementing its zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, in particular by treating every allegation seriously and pursuing appropriate action. UN-Habitat has continuously sensitized its personnel on matters relating to sexual exploitation and abuse through internal broadcasts and reporting of cases through a secure online tracker;

(i) Shared, through internal broadcasts, the United Nations guidance document entitled “Your Rights”<sup>1</sup> as a reminder to staff members and related personnel of the rights of victims and survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations staff members, including UN-Habitat staff and related personnel.

6. To further strengthen its efforts regarding protection against sexual exploitation and abuse and against sexual harassment, as well as any other kind of exploitation and abuse, UN-Habitat plans to implement the following actions in 2024:

(a) Increase awareness-raising through the use of banners and other promotional materials, such as those displayed at the last session of 2023 of the Executive Board. UN-Habitat plans to use and disseminate these materials in field offices and during flagship events, such as the World Urban Forum, World Cities Day and World Habitat Day;

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<sup>1</sup> Available at [https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/victims\\_rights\\_statement\\_on\\_sea\\_may\\_2023\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/sites/www.un.org.preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/files/victims_rights_statement_on_sea_may_2023_web.pdf).

- (b) Provide additional training on protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, including through specific training packages, in particular for UN-Habitat staff and related personnel in field offices;
- (c) Enhance participation, through UN-Habitat focal points, in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. UN-Habitat actively participates in the activities of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. It plans to participate in the upcoming Organization-wide Inter-Agency Standing Committee workshop, to be held in Brindisi, Italy, from 23 to 25 April 2024, and will participate annually thereafter;
- (d) Conduct surveys on a regular basis and increase the participation of personnel, in particular those in field offices, in the annual survey on sexual exploitation and abuse;
- (e) Appoint focal points on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in each regional office and in field offices;
- (f) Enhance reporting on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. In the absence of a staff member dedicated to the function, and with existing focal points performing two or three functions, reporting on the matter is very limited. UN-Habitat welcomes soft-earmarked support and stands ready to work with Member States to translate the action plan for the year 2024 into more solid measures;
- (g) Continue to inform UN-Habitat staff and related personnel of the policy on protection against retaliation so as to enable and empower them to report incidents of prohibited conduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

7. In addition to its efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, UN-Habitat reaffirms its commitment to zero tolerance for any act of harassment, including sexual harassment, discrimination or abuse of authority, and is wholly and firmly committed to ensuring that all staff are aware of the policies currently in place – such as the Secretary-General’s bulletins on addressing discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority (ST/SGB/2019/8) and on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13) – as well as the actions to be taken in respect thereof.

8. In 2023, there was one reported allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse involving two former UN-Habitat staff members. The allegation was forwarded to the Office of Internal Oversight Services for appropriate action. The Office has confirmed that the case is still under consideration.

9. The report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, at its seventy-seventh session, on investigations into sexual exploitation and related offences in 2023, including data on relevant allegations received in the preceding calendar year, will be made available online once it has been published. The report of the Secretary-General on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (A/77/748), prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/278, 71/297, 72/312, 73/302, 75/321 and 76/274, contains updated information on measures taken by the United Nations to strengthen the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

10. Subject to the availability of funds, there are plans to devote more staff and resources to the handling of cases relating to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, retaliation, and other forms of unsatisfactory conduct. It is proposed to have a staff member at the P-4 level serve as a focal point for conduct and disciplinary matters, including on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment and issues of unethical conduct.

## Annex\*

## End-of-year management letter on protection from and reporting of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse

In accordance with Section 4.6 of the Secretary-General's Bulletin on "*Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse*" (ST/SGB/2003/13), and with and consistent with directive of the Executive Board of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, ("UN-Habitat"), paragraph (a) 5 of *Decision 2023/1* adopted by the Executive Board of UN-Habitat during its First session for the year 2023 from 28 to 29 March 2023, and, as contained in document HSP/EB.2023/7, I, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Under-Secretary-General and Executive of UN-Habitat, hereby certify that UN-Habitat has reported to the Secretary-General all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, (SEA), that have been brought to its attention and has taken all appropriate measures to address such allegations, in accordance with established rules and procedures for dealing with cases of misconduct. For the year 2023, there was one reported allegation of SEA involving two former UN-Habitat staff members of which, was forwarded to the Office of Internal Oversight Services, (OIOS), for the appropriate action.

Furthermore, in line with the Secretary General's priorities, I certify that UN-Habitat has:

- (i) placed the rights and dignity of victims at the centre and properly sought to address their needs by proactively following up to ensure that every reported victim – with their consent – has received assistance and support, in a manner consistent with the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel;
- (ii) been resolute on ending impunity, by ensuring accountability through prompt reporting, timely and victim-centred assessment and investigation of all allegations it received,<sup>1</sup> and that where an allegation is substantiated, the matter has been addressed consistently in accordance with the United Nations staff rules, regulations and administrative issuances;
- (iii) appointed PSEA focal points at UN-Habitat Headquarters and has been proactive in conducting awareness raising activities for its staff members and related personnel, regarding the prohibition of SEA and ways of reporting such acts. This year 82% of its staff members and related personnel,<sup>2</sup> have completed induction or refresher training on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and were reminded of their individual obligation to report any incidents of SEA; and
- (iv) actively and continuously communicated and advocated on issues relating to PSEA, engaged in/joined outreach efforts to raise awareness about PSEA among the communities we serve, and implemented effective ways of reporting such allegations of SEA.

Furthermore, UN-Habitat has actively engaged with Member States, civil society and/or other partners on PSEA and pursued all appropriate means to ensure the effective protection of populations against sexual exploitation and abuse.

In addition, UN-Habitat has reinforced its efforts to manage risks of sexual exploitation and abuse when establishing funded partnerships.

UN-Habitat ensured that its civil society organization partners<sup>3</sup> were assessed on their capacity to prevent and respond to SEA. Based on the assessment, partners received capacity strengthening support as required to ensure PSEA systems are in place.

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\* The annex is reproduced as received, without formal editing.

<sup>1</sup> All allegations that came to our attention were properly assessed, however not all result in a full investigation.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this letter, the term "United Nations staff and related personnel" includes United Nations staff members, individual consultants/contractors, interns, United Nations Volunteers and affiliated personnel.

<sup>3</sup> At this time, the requirement of screening partners on PSEA, as enshrined in the 2018 Protocol, has only been implemented for civil society partners through the 2020 Harmonized Implementation Tool on PSEA capacity. It is intended for the assessment process to be expanded to cover additional partners in the near future.

UN-Habitat has also completed the annual Action Plan for measures undertaken to prevent and respond to SEA and conducted appropriate risk assessments for each of its operations and programmes, has acted upon the results, and continues to review these on an ongoing basis.

UN-Habitat is committed to zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and abuse, to treating every allegation seriously and pursuing appropriate action. Therefore, UN-Habitat continually sensitizes its personnel on matters relating to SEA through internal Broadcasts, reporting cases received, if any, on *iReport SEA tracker*, a secure online platform of a centralised database containing information on allegations on SEA, devised by the UN Secretariat as well as being cognizant of reports generated on UN-Habitat's "SpeakUP" App. The "SpeakUP" App became a key feature of the UN-Habitat's Safer Cities Global Programme for women and girls as well as young people in urban areas. Furthermore, UN-Habitat has sanctions for non-compliance, in accordance with ST/SGB/2003/13, with the support of UN-Habitat's Legal Unit and in consultation with the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA), if there is evidence to support allegations of SEA, such cases may be referred to national authorities for criminal prosecution.

UN-Habitat is further committed to not partner with any implementing partner that fails to appropriately address sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. As such, consistent with the United Nations standard conditions of contract, UN-Habitat reaffirms that all its Agreements of Cooperation with its implementing partners incorporates conditions relating to SEA of which, obligates implementing partners to take all appropriate measures to SEA of any one by it or by any of its employees or any other persons who may be engaged by the implementing partner to perform services under the respective Agreement of Cooperation between UN-Habitat and the implementing partner. Moreover, the said condition requires implementing partners to refrain from, and take all reasonable and appropriate measures to prohibit its employees or other persons engaged or controlled by it from any form of sexual exploitation and abuse. UN-Habitat is also working towards ensuring that its implementing partners undergo training in the prevention of SEA.

UN-Habitat has also shared via internal Broadcast the United Nations Victim Statement, "Your Rights", as reminder to staff members and related personnel of the rights of victims/survivors of SEA committed by United Nations including UN-Habitat staff members or related personnel. This is to ensure that the mechanisms established to address a victim-centred approach in relation to victims/survivors of SEA committed by UN-Habitat staff members or related personnel having the right to: (a) seek assistance and support from UN-Habitat; (b) seek justice and accountability by submitting a complaint of SEA to UN-Habitat which has the responsibility to refer the complaint for investigation as well as assistance on how to access legal support and accountability including in national proceedings; (c) decide how to be involved in the United Nations processes such as to participate or cooperate in any United Nations proceedings including those resulting from the fact that one is a victim/survivor of SEA; (d) to be informed as early as possible, about processes and procedures involved in reporting incidents of SEA; (e) privacy and confidentiality in deciding what information a victim/survivor will provide and what information can be released or not to actors outside the UN-Habitat; and (g) keeping the victim/survivor safe; are implemented. Any harassment, intimidation or retaliation for reporting SEA are not tolerated and are addressed in accordance with the relevant rules, regulations, policies and procedures in place for dealing with these matters.

I recognize that leadership, transparency and accountability are essential to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse within the United Nations system and hereby certify that I have exercised my duties in this regard diligently, in good faith and to the very best of my abilities.

29 December 2023

**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**  
Under-Secretary-General and  
Executive Director