

Remarks for the 82nd Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Agenda item 2(b) – Oral Update on Integrity
15 September 2021

Madame Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

On Monday the New York Magazine published a piece describing experiences of sexual assault and/or harassment faced by colleagues across the United Nations system. That piece was a kick in the gut, and a stark reminder how much more we need to do as an organization and as a system, first and foremost for the victims whose courageous voices came out so clearly in that piece.

You have heard the High Commissioner and the rest of us speak for several years in this setting – about our resolve and about the actions we are taking to strengthen the prevention of all forms of misconduct, fraud and corruption, about how there is no place in UNHCR for people that do harm to others and profit from the organization mandated to protect, aid, and solve.

Yes, we still face enormous challenges. We hear this from victims, and we see this in our efforts to prevent and respond to incidents. But I believe we are on the right track. We have strengthened oversight and internal controls, and worked hard to build a workplace where everyone feels included, a sense of belonging, and is safe and respected. We have done this through various parts of the house, and we are seeing results.

Colleagues are placing their trust in our systems, as evidenced by increased reporting. Bystanders realize they too have a responsibility. And efforts to create a more positive work environment are slowly taking root.

This is what we have highlighted in the document provided in background to this session, and what we would like to focus on here today. It includes activities of the Ethics Office, the Ombudsman, Enterprise Risk Management, and the Office of the Senior Coordinator for Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment – all working in concert – to try to bring about this cultural shift in our organization.

The work undertaken by these entities is significant and forms a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. It includes a range of actions designed to ensure colleagues benefit from an environment that normalises speaking up, and engaging in constructive dialogue on both positive and negative issues. It also includes work designed to ensure that colleagues' needs are a central and guiding principle of the organisation's efforts to prevent and respond to the more serious forms of workplace issues. This Victim or Survivor Centred Approach is not only about what we do, but how we do it, ensuring victims are listened to, that we take their needs, rights, wishes and views into account, and accompany and support them throughout

And as entities have undertaken this work, they have also endeavoured to increase collaboration and synergies between them. This includes work, following up on decisions taken by the High Commissioner, to improve the organisation's analysis, reporting,

interventions and recording of integrity cases and to design a Complaint, Advice and Response Mechanism to ensure greater coordination, collaboration, referral, and monitoring of resolutions to workplace matters which cannot be solved locally and informally.

Distinguished delegates,

We have invested much in the formal side of our integrity response in recent years. This has allowed us, among other, to terminate the employment of eleven personnel for sexual harassment over the last three years. These eleven cases were recorded in the Clear Check database, ensuring system-wide consequences for perpetrators, and this tool was also used this year to record allegations of sexual harassment which were substantiated against two colleagues who resigned before the completion of the disciplinary process.

But while this formal response, and the disciplinary process it leads to, is necessary in some situations, we cannot investigate ourselves out of negative, and at times toxic, work environments. Efforts to create a more positive work environment will help balance an informal system allowing colleagues to speak up and engage in constructive dialogue to resolve issues informally where possible, and a formal system freed up to focus its resources on addressing the most problematic issues when necessary.

I am very proud of the UNHCR team -- those of course who work and serve in some of the most dangerous and complex environments on earth and those who work behind the scenes to strengthen this organization further. Together we are dedicated to the task, humbled by the challenges ahead yet fully resolved to strengthen us further.

Thank you.