

Prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims



In 2018, her first full year in the mandate, the Victims' Rights Advocate prioritized **advocacy, engagement and consultations** with Member States, United Nations system, intergovernmental and regional organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders, in the field and other locations, to gather their perspectives on issues related to victims' rights and assistance and ensure that a **victim-centred approach** is institutionalized and integrated in all United Nations' activities to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. These consultations also aimed at identifying and

sharing best practices to strengthen existing policies and tools and the development of others where needed.

As part of an effort to mainstream a victim-centred approach which is joined up across the system, the Victims' Rights Advocate convened a meeting on 15 March 2018 of relevant mandates which address aspects of sexual exploitation and abuse, including the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, sexual violence in conflict, and violence against children, relevant human rights special procedures mandates, as well as representatives of relevant United Nations entities. The discussion focused on synergies and complementarities in mandates, as well as best practices and lessons-learned in prevention, reporting and lodging complaints, the provision of support services and access to justice for victims.



The Victims' Rights Advocate convened a consultation on 13 September 2018 of representatives of members of the High-Level Steering Group on sexual exploitation and abuse and other United Nations entities to discuss and identify the core elements of a victim-centred approach in the Organization's response to sexual exploitation and abuse. The discussion focused on issues related to reporting, complaint mechanisms and investigations, assistance and support provision, and communication and follow-up with victims. The Consultation was followed by a dedicated discussion amongst High-Level Steering Group Principals, which took place on 10 December 2018. The meeting resulted in recommendations for follow-up action, including whether existing strategies, frameworks, policies, programmes and tools require revision to strengthen victim-centred responses across United Nations entities system-wide. A second Consultation took place on 7 February 2019, focused on prevention measures and the realization of justice for victims and accountability of perpetrators.

The outcome of these discussions will inform the **expert consultation** that the Victims' Rights Advocate will convene in the second quarter of 2019, as requested by Secretary-General in his 2018 report on special measures (A/72/751, paragraph 28). The expert consultation will bring together regional and national experts on victims' rights from all regions and will assist the Victims' Rights Advocate to craft a **statement on victims' rights** to serve as a common point of reference for all personnel working under the United Nations flag. The statement will constitute an overarching policy tool informing the development and strengthening of reporting pathways for victims or witnesses of violations to file complaints, provision of personal care for

victims and follow-up attention, provision of information on their cases and access to accountability mechanisms. It will also make victims aware of what they should expect from United Nations personnel and the responses available if personnel do not live up to required standards.

As the mandate is system-wide, the Victims' Rights Advocate is closely engaging with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) so that the **humanitarian sector** also integrates a victim-centred approach in its efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse. She participated in meetings of IASC Principals during the year where the focus was on strengthening efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse, including through enhanced procedures for screening of personnel and sharing information across relevant sectors, and creating victim-centred investigatory capacities. The IASC Principals have affirmed the need for strong coordination with the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the need for robust systems, capacities, resources and follow-up support, services and remedies to encourage victims to come forward. The Victims' Rights Advocate is working closely with the IASC to develop victim-centred approaches to investigations of sexual, abuse and exploitation and harassment in the humanitarian sector and support efforts to scale-up assistance and support to victims on the ground. For example, the Victims' Rights Advocate, OHCHR and UNICEF led a session on integrating a victim-centred approach to investigations in the joint IASC-CEB meeting of investigatory bodies on 26 November 2018.

In parallel, the Victims' Rights Advocate is engaging with development actors to ensure that the **development sector** similarly integrates a victim-centred approach, particularly in the context of the reform to the United Nations development architecture and the Resident Coordinator system. The Victims' Rights Advocate is a member of a development assistance and cooperation reference group, established by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in the development sector. She also cooperates with the development banks and international financial institutions, including the World Bank, on measures and standards to prevent and respond sexual exploitation and abuse.

In June 2018, the Victims' Rights Advocate established an inter-agency working group to improve and better coordinate the United Nations approach to facilitation of **paternity claims** arising from sexual exploitation and abuse. This includes providing victims with the necessary information on the status of their cases, which enables them to substantiate their paternity claims and ensure that their children get the support to which they are entitled, for example by supporting their appearance in national legal processes. The working group held several meetings and agreed to develop a **harmonized procedure for handling paternity claims** (from reporting to outcome), including procedures for communicating with victims/claimants and follow-up for consideration by Member States. Led by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, a study will also be prepared highlighting good practice examples, as well as gaps and challenges in line with the Secretary-General's proposal (A/69/779, paragraph 72).

Pursuant to the Secretary-General's request that a comprehensive mapping be undertaken of victims' rights approaches and services available system-wide to build on the work already undertaken in this area, and provide a clear overview of gaps, overlap, lessons learned and best practices (A/72/751, paragraph 28), the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate initiated a **pilot mapping of victims' rights approaches and services** available to provide legal, medical, psycho-social, safety, shelter and livelihood support for victims in eight countries. The mapping will identify both system-wide and external capacities available locally, where cases of sexual exploitation and abuse have been reported, or where the United Nations has identified risk

ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

My priority is to give visibility to those who have suffered, including through connecting with them personally. I wish to amplify their voices in a way that cannot be ignored, and to support them as they rebuild their lives.

Jane Connors
UN Victims' Rights Advocate

Honouring our values

factors. The results of this mapping will provide a baseline for the development of victim-centred approaches going forward and will help the Organization establish a methodology enabling all United Nations field operations to undertake similar mapping exercises.

Work continued, led by DMSPC, UNICEF and supported by the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, to finalize a Uniform Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, including to incorporate the roles of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Field Victims' Rights Advocates. The Protocol, which aims to strengthen a coordinated system-wide approach and linkages among missions and country teams in the field, provides guidance on assistance for and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by staff and related personnel or by non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate.

The Victims' Rights Advocate conducted three **field visits** during the year to gain a first-hand understanding of how United Nations actors operate on the ground to assist and support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and make recommendations for further action: Haiti in April 2018, Lebanon in August 2018 and Jordan in September 2018 – locations which include humanitarian response settings, as well as a special political and peacekeeping missions.]



As follow-up to these visits, the Victims' Rights Advocate prepared internal reports in collaboration with interlocutors on the ground. The reports include victims' perspectives and opinions on United Nations action related to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as recommendations. The field visits provided United Nations system actors with an opportunity to come together to assess the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, and created a context to craft stronger partnerships on the ground and identify gaps and duplication.

Where it has been possible, and at their request, the Victims' Rights Advocate **meets victims** confidentially and individually, particularly during her visits. Frequently, victims voice their frustration, especially after multiple interactions with United Nations representatives, humanitarian actors and the media, as their situations remain unchanged. The Victims' Rights Advocate greatly appreciates these encounters as victims provide her with concrete proposals on ways to realize their rights.

The work of the **Field Victims' Rights Advocates** continues to have positive impact. They are the main contact for all victims of sexual exploitation and abuse on the ground and play a catalytic role in bringing United Nations and civil society actors together, and improving collaboration and cooperation to support victims and realize their rights.

In the **Central African Republic**, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate, with the Conduct and Discipline Team,



fostered stronger partnerships, coordination and collaboration among United Nations entities and other actors to ensure timely response to victims. The Field Victims' Rights Advocate also assisted in the development of a project to address paternity claims arising from sexual exploitation and abuse, including capacity-building of the Human Rights Commission, Bar Association and legal partners to facilitate access to justice in this context. The project will be funded by the [Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) (Trust Fund).

With the support of the Field Victims' Rights Advocate, MINUSCA established 22 Community-Based Complaint Mechanism's in high-risk areas of the country, and trained and equipped more than 500 of their members with

¹ A community-based complaints mechanism blends formal and informal community structures, where individuals are able and encouraged to safely report allegations. Local communities are involved in development so that the structure is both culturally and gender-sensitive. The mechanism should be safe, confidential, transparent and accessible and should have multiple entry points, allowing reports to be made

basic communication tools, such as mobile phones, SIM cards, etc. The establishment of these mechanisms has improved the provision of victims' assistance and referral pathways, as well as information-sharing with local actors on victims' needs.



Efforts continued to maintain and update a common, harmonized database on victims' assistance. In collaboration with the Conduct and Discipline Team, training on prevention, monitoring, victims' assistance and working with victims, was provided in English and French to 36 focal points on sexual exploitation and abuse across the system.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate worked with UNICEF and UNFPA to strengthen referral pathways for victims to service providers. Vocational training, livelihood and income-generating projects were developed by the Conduct and Discipline Team in close coordination with the Field Victims' Rights Advocate, and members of Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms, and funded by the Trust Fund. Three hundred and six vulnerable members of the population, including victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, who are direct beneficiaries of these projects, acknowledged their positive impact in livelihood support.

In **Haiti**, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate facilitated greater cooperation, coordination and strengthened working relationships among United Nations entities and implementing partners, including to streamline assistance and support provision to victims, and facilitate greater consultation with victims. A sub-group of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Taskforce (PSEA Task Force) was established to enhance coordination and coherence in victims' assistance and support. United Nations entities in the Country Team are collaborating with a network of non-governmental organizations to jointly develop proposals on a range of prevention and awareness-raising initiatives, as well as income-generating activities for victims, for support from the Trust Fund. Additionally, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate is engaging with a network of humanitarian non-governmental organizations active on issues related to sexual exploitation and exploitation and facilitated their inclusion in the PSEA Task Force.



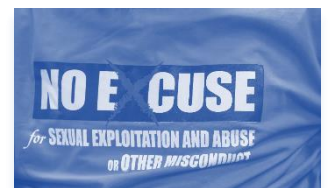
As follow-up to the visit of the Victims' Rights Advocate to Haiti in April 2018, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate spearheaded the launch of a project by MINUJUSTH to provide educational support to children of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by MINUSTAH personnel. The project, which has been extended for a further six-months, provides school fees and lunch boxes for such children. Additionally, and as part of the efforts of the inter-agency working group on paternity claims, the Victims' Rights Advocate worked with the Field Victims' Rights Advocate so that communication with victims on outstanding paternity claims arising from MINUSTAH is more timely and concrete. As a result, a number of victims received the formal results of DNA testing for which they had been waiting for some time.

through various channels, through community structures or focal points, networks, and organizational focal points. See https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20%20%5BSecond%20Edition%20-%202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdf



In **South Sudan**, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate has sharpened UNMISS' focus on victims and ensured that services, specifically legal, medical, psycho-social and other basic support (i.e. the provision of mobile phones, SIM cards and travel funds) are made available to victims in a timely manner. An assistance framework is under development. The "No-Excuse" card has been translated into five local languages. Additionally, the team is working closely with the PSEA Taskforce to establish Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms throughout the country, train and raise awareness of community members on standards of conduct and reporting allegations, and monitor their

functioning. These efforts have increased opportunities for victims to come forward and report allegations. The Field Victims' Rights Advocate, together with the Conduct and Discipline Team, are partnering with a national non-governmental organization to provide legal assistance to victims, particularly with respect to paternity and child support claims. Together with other United Nations personnel, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate supported the convening of a mobile court outside Juba, which heard criminal cases against several perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse, resulting in some convictions. Projects have been developed for submission to the Trust Fund to provide legal support, income-generation and livelihood support, education and vocational training, and art therapy to victims. On 6 December 2018, the Field Victims' Rights Advocate and the Conduct and Discipline Team organized a "Stand-down on sexual exploitation and abuse" event with the participation of local schools.



Dedicated specialized posts for three Field Victims' Rights Advocates were included in the 2018/19 proposed budgets for MINUSCA, MINUJUSTH and MONUSCO and approved by the General Assembly.² At the time of writing the present report, these posts were under recruitment. A dedicated post of Field Victims' Rights Advocate will be included in the 2019/2020 proposed budget for UNMISS.

What's next

The results of the activities initiated in 2018 should be available in 2019:

- **Mapping of victims' rights approaches/services:** In line with the Secretary-General's instruction in his 2018 special measures report (A/72/751, paragraph 28), the Victims' Rights Advocate is conducting a pilot mapping of victims' rights approaches/services (on prevention, medical, psycho-social and legal assistance, livelihood support, accountability) available in eight countries across the United Nations system and beyond. The pilot will build on existing work and be the first step in providing a clear system-wide **overview of gaps, overlap, lessons-learned and best practices** in order to inform the development of additional tools, policies and programmes;
- **Collection of best practices implemented by States and civil society** to ensure that victims receive personal care, follow-up attention and information on their case;
- **Development of policies and tools to strengthen support for victims:** In the second quarter of 2019, the Victims' Rights Advocate will convene experts, including national-level victims' rights advocates and legal aid organizations, to help develop policies and tools, in particular a statement on victims' rights to strengthen support for victims, including through legal assistance;
- **Resolution of outstanding paternity/child support claims:** Through a dedicated working group, the Victims' Rights Advocate will continue to facilitate a more timely and effective resolution of outstanding paternity/child support claims arising from sexual exploitation and abuse.

² Resolutions 72/290, 72/260B and 72/293.

A call to action

By calling for victims to be placed at the centre of our prevention and response strategy, the Secretary-General sought to shift the focus beyond conduct and discipline of personnel and the reputation of the Organization to the people affected by the wrongful conduct. There have been significant steps forward across the United Nations system to scale-up support to victims and integrate a victim-centred approach so these are joined up, but we have many challenges to overcome before the strategy is translated fully from rhetoric to reality.

We need to do better to reach out to communities and raise awareness so that victims know where to turn for help and report.

We need to do better to ensure that victims receive timely information and follow-up on the status of their cases.

We need to improve the range of services available for victims – be it medical, psycho-social, legal or livelihood support.

For many victims, access to justice and accountability remains elusive. Many are completely disconnected from investigative or accountability processes and complain that they have no idea about the status of their cases.

They lack appropriate and adequate legal assistance – a key gap which needs urgently to be addressed.

We must be more imaginative and resolute in prevention, realizing accountability and combating impunity. Here, we need support from all stakeholders - States, government institutions and civil society to achieve those ends so that victims can become survivors

These are my priorities going forward. I welcome your support, collaboration and encouragement.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'McDonnell'.