

Action to address gender based violence in emergencies:

IASC Statement of Commitment

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We, the members of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), are gravely concerned by the widespread gender based violence in emergencies. We are particularly concerned by the systematic and rampant use of sexual violence in conflict situations as a method of war to brutalise and instil fear in the civilian population, especially women and girls.

We are further dismayed by recent reports of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse perpetrated by UN peacekeepers and UN civilian staff.

We, therefore, re-emphasise our individual and collective responsibility to respect the highest standards of the law and to fully comply with the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13)¹.

We further commit ourselves to urgent and concerted action aimed at preventing gender based violence, including in particular sexual violence, ensuring appropriate care and follow-up for victims/survivors and working towards holding perpetrators accountable. In particular, we make a commitment to:

1. Strengthen prevention measures: The damaging effects of conflict, such as displacement, the destruction of community structures, poverty and lack of resources increase the risk of gender based violence. We must reinforce our efforts to provide timely and comprehensive assistance and protection, in the full respect of our humanitarian principles, to protect those in need from all forms of gender based violence, particularly sexual violence. Prevention measures should include:

- Ensuring that the implementation of our operational activities prevents putting affected populations, especially girls and women, at risk of gender based violence;
- Supporting national authorities to ensure effective security for civilian populations, particularly women and children, including through policing and deterrence measures;
- Promoting the effective administration of justice so as to strengthen accountability, including by providing legal counselling and supporting victims/survivors' access to justice;
- Providing training programmes for peacekeepers, police and arms bearers on the prohibition of sexual violence in international legal instruments, and encouraging the increased presence of women in peacekeeping operations, police and armed forces;
- Supporting capacity development and training of national governments, national NGOs and local communities in undertaking preventive measures.

2. Ensure implementation of the IASC policy on gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance: Gender inequality is directly linked to gender based violence. Addressing gender discrimination, including by ensuring that women and girls become full participants in decision-making, is a critical step towards ending this form of violence.

3. Promote compliance of international law and strengthen efforts to address impunity: In situations of armed conflict, gender based violence, including in particular sexual violence, must be seen in the broader context of violence against civilians. We must therefore encourage Governments to comply with the provisions of international law during and after

¹ ochaonline.un.org/GetBin.asp?DocID=1083

armed conflicts. As perpetrators of sexual violence continue to enjoy near complete impunity, we must also support more decisive action on the part of Governments to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. We also welcome the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and encourage its efforts to ensure meaningful accountability for violence against women and children in cases where national authorities fail.

4. Improve reporting and data collection: Increase capacity to monitor and report on acts of gender based violence, particularly sexual violence, on the basis of international law, and support mechanisms for seeking redress. This will include enhancing cooperation with human rights mechanisms (treaty bodies and special procedures), including in particular the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, regional human rights mechanisms and human rights NGOs. Promote systematic sex- and age- disaggregated data collection and analysis as a basis for developing effective programming as well as monitoring and evaluation.

5. Provide care and follow up to victims/survivors: Develop and strengthen programmes and services to address the psychological, social and physical consequences of gender based violence, particularly sexual violence, for victims/survivors and to assist in their reintegration into the broader community, including by:

- Providing appropriate psychological and social support to victims/survivors and to the communities in which they live;
- Providing comprehensive and sensitive medical care to victims/survivors, including, as appropriate, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) along with voluntary counseling and testing and comprehensive reproductive health care for victims/survivors of rape.

6. Address continuing problems of sexual abuse and exploitation by personnel responsible for providing assistance and protection to affected populations: We reaffirm our commitment to the principles and practices outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin, including by ensuring that all UN Country Teams establish accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms to receive and thoroughly investigate all allegations of misconduct and that all necessary steps are taken to punish perpetrators and prevent further incidences of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. We call on the peacekeeping community to also act in the full respect of the Bulletin and to ensure the accountability of perpetrators. At the same time, we recognise the need to equip Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, UN Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinators and Country Teams in the field with adequate technical assistance and human resources to fulfil their responsibilities towards the implementation of the Bulletin. Further, we reiterate the importance of ensuring that non-UN entities and individuals are well informed of the standards of conduct set out in the Bulletin.

7. Speak out against gender based violence in emergencies: We must reinforce efforts to advocate on behalf of victims/survivors and for the full accountability of perpetrators.

8. Develop an IASC policy and plan of action and strengthen capacity building on gender based violence: Building on existing policies and guidelines, including the IASC Matrix for Gender Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, we must promote a coherent, participatory and multi-sectoral approach to prevent and respond to gender based violence.