

**-centred response to sexual exploitation and  
abuse through partnerships with national human rights institutions challenges and**

*Co-hosted by OVRA and GANHRI and co-sponsored by OHCHR and the Permanent  
Missions of Australia, Costa Rica, and Germany.*

28 October 2021 (09:00-11:00am, EST)

**Summary and Action Points**

**Overview**

1. The online event brought together stakeholders from across

## Perspectives of field advocates

4. The field advocates in Haiti, Ritu Gambhir, and the Advocate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christine Besong, provided an overview of their roles and responsibilities as the main point of contact for victims on the ground, emphasizing their primary function to ensure the rights of all victims are always respected. The advocates in the field underscored that victims should be provided with support as soon as an allegation is received. The types of support available could include access to medical, psychosocial, education and livelihood assistance in line with the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy and the Victims' Rights Framework.<sup>1</sup> Field advocates communicate with victims in order to ensure victims understand where, how, and what to report; manage expectations and ensure that victims know what to expect from the process and keep victims updated with the status of their cases.
5. The VRA noted that it can be difficult for victims to seek support, especially as victims often do not differentiate among United Nations agencies nor understand where to direct their allegations. Complaint pathways can be context-specific, with different reporting pathways co-existing. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO has nine Community-Based Complaint Mechanisms (CBCMs) which, inter alia, receive allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse and transmit them to the appropriate bodies. These CBCMs enlist over 1,000 volunteers annually who are trained on how to refer allegations confidentially and safely.
6. In Haiti, CBCMs are not as well developed and Ritu Gambhir indicated that the main mechanism for receiving complaints is through the Office of the Ombudsperson (*Office de la Protection du Citoyen, OPC*), a national human rights institution. Telephone and video hotlines are also available, but victims tend to prefer speaking to someone who they trust in person. Victims could also be referred for support by the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) or United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes (AFPs), especially the PSEA specialists attached to AFPs.
7. The field advocates explained that their roles may also involve being embedded in United Nations investigations not as investigators, but to support victims and ensure their rights and dignity are respected. The provision of legal aid to victims was identified as one of the most challenging aspects of their work, which required liaison with Member States and *pro bono* lawyers to pursue paternity claims for child support from alleged fathers, often involving multiple jurisdictions.
8. Christine Besong recounted that in 2017 in the DRC an implementing partner of UNICEF initiated four cases of paternity and child support in courts, but that after a short time, all the victims withdrew their cases, explaining this as resulting from the length of time and the seeming futility of seeking a court ruling. Besong noted the lack of understanding of legal processes in the DRC, the perception of the process as costly and time-consuming,

---

<sup>1</sup> The [United Nations Protocol on the Provision of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#), endorsed by the High-level Steering Group in 2019, builds on the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel ([A/RES/62/214, annex](#)) and sets out the standards, in line with existing frameworks, applicable to strengthening a coordinated, system-wide approach to the provision of assistance and support which prioritize the rights and dignity of victims, regardless of the affiliation of the perpetrators.

and the fear of backlash and retaliation that continues to dissuade victims from coming forward and engaging in legal processes. To empower victims to self-sustain and live independently, projects financed by the [Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) and implemented in cooperation with local partners on the ground provides livelihood support to victims, including payment of tuition fees for children born of sexual exploitation and abuse.

9. The field advocates noted that resources to support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse are not always available. United Nations entities may not have specific funds dedicated to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. At times, the peacekeeping or special political mission or implementing partners have assisted in facilitating this support. NHRIs have also been able to bridge gaps in the provision of urgent support to victims. The field advocate in the Central African Republic, Maria Fernanda Perez Solla, recalled how safe housing for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse was made available by state authorities in collaboration with local human rights actors.

## **Potential roles for NHRIs and areas of collaboration**

- Spearheading public information campaigns amongst communities in countries with a United Nations presence to raise awareness of the conduct that is expected from United Nations personnel.
- Playing a role in pushing governments and the United Nations to promptly investigate the actions and take remedial action.
- **Advocating** on behalf of victims and encouraging Member States to support the resolution of longstanding cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Advising on and advocating for the full implementation of relevant legal frameworks where they exist, but also advocating for improvements on legal frameworks which