

**Joint statement: Item 21.1**  
**Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment**  
**EB152 – January 2023**

Thank you Chair.

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of

Slovenia, Ghana, South Africa, Rwanda, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Chile, Japan, Israel, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, USA, Canada, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Montenegro, New Zealand, Australia; Germany, Mexico, France, Uruguay, Portugal, Cyprus, Peru, Argentina, Monaco, Brazil, Latvia, Costa Rica, Austria, Ireland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Luxembourg, Malta, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Spain, Italy, Slovakia, Czechia, Republic of Korea, Maldives, Panama, Ecuador, Ukraine, Eswatini and United Kingdom.

Chair, since January 2018, we have been raising deep concerns about allegations relating to matters of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, as well as abuse of authority by WHO staff and contractors.

We recognise the significant progress made by WHO particularly as we transition from the Management Response Plan to implementation of the forthcoming three-year strategy for the “prevention and response to sexual misconduct” with its associated monitoring and accountability framework.

As we focus on the task ahead, recognising the strides WHO has made in recent years, the organisation must also continue to reflect on the challenges we need to address, risks we must manage, and lessons learned. We praise the bravery of survivors and whistleblowers in coming forward, and all who have supported investigations. To that end, we will engage with WHO in due course on the findings of the UN OIOS investigation report, related to the 10<sup>th</sup> Ebola outbreak in DRC.

We welcome the IEOAC Sub-Committee’s report and agree that the investigations function for dealing with misconduct must be stabilized. Dedicated, sustainable funding, and attracting staff with the right skillset and capability for this work, will be critical.

### **Shifting to a victim and survivor centred approach**

A victim and survivor centred approach must be at the core of WHO’s work. We welcome progress that WHO has made on this front through reform of policies and systems. Meaningful community engagement, tailored to context, is critical to ensuring victims and survivors are protected. Their rights, privacy, needs and wishes should be prioritised, including in the investigative process, and also through strengthening community-based-reporting mechanisms and structures. Victims and survivors must be provided with appropriate support, including psychosocial support.

### **Strengthening capacity and ensuring accountability**

Building a culture based on integrity, transparency and accountability is crucial for empowering staff and beneficiaries to come forward. We encourage WHO management to set the tone and lead by example in these areas, particularly by establishing clear responsibility and accountability lines.

We strongly support WHO's investment in capacity-building and training for staff. This work should build awareness of the power differentials and inequalities between victims and perpetrators that lie at the root of SEAH.

Complaints must be addressed in a timely manner, and perpetrators held to account, so we strongly support efforts to strengthen WHO's investigative capacity. We expect prompt and confidential reporting to be provided to Member States, including on the actions taken to address SEAH. Confidentiality and safeguards against the leaking of private information must be ensured.

### **Safeguarding in high-risk settings**

We appreciate WHO's efforts to embed robust SEAH safeguards in its operations, especially in high-risk settings through the rapid deployment of PRSEAH experts to mitigate risks. WHO should continue to prioritise PRSEAH inter-agency coordination, particularly around the design and operation of complaints mechanisms, and the response to reports.

### **The way forward**

We commend the hard work of all at WHO driving progress on PRSEAH and we will continue working closely with you, to ensure credible outcomes and that the highest standards prevail.

Thank you Chair.