

Cross-regional Statement

WHO

156th Executive Board

(3-11 February 2025)

Agenda item 24.1 – Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment

Geneva, 10 February 2025

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Chair,
Director General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Republic of Moldova, New Zealand, The Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

We reaffirm our zero tolerance policy and remain committed to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in all contexts, including within the World Health Organization and its operations. We recognize that SEAH is a form of gender-based-violence rooted in structural, especially gender inequality. It is essential that all efforts to prevent and respond to SEAH have a human-rights-based approach.

We welcome the Director-General's report on the implementation of WHO's three-year strategy for institutionalizing zero tolerance for all forms of sexual misconduct. The progress made so far demonstrates WHO's commitment to addressing this critical issue, which is essential for the Organization to truly uphold its commitment for gender equity and human rights also internally. However, we must acknowledge the importance of sustaining effort and momentum to ensure maximum prevention of and effective response to sexual misconduct within all WHO activities, or to any other form of misconduct, at all levels of the Organization and across entities of the UN system.

We strongly believe that clear, robust frameworks for accountability are essential to prevent sexual misconduct and provide appropriate responses should incidents occur.

Among the key priorities, firstly, we call for enhanced efforts of WHO in implementing preventive measures, including comprehensive and tailored training programs, robust screening procedures, and clear reporting mechanisms. These efforts should extend to all levels of operations, from headquarters to regional and country offices as well as field operations, including implementing partners, with a specific emphasis on emergency contexts.

Secondly, we stress the importance of victim- and survivor-centered, gender-based approaches in all SEAH-related policies and responses ensuring no harm. This includes ensuring accessible, confidential reporting mechanisms, non-discrimination and equal application providing comprehensive support to survivors, and maintaining transparency throughout investigation processes while protecting the affected persons' privacy. We must ensure the survivors' voices are central in decision-making, in an empowering way, so that their experiences shape policies aimed at preventing and responding to SEAH.

Thirdly, we encourage WHO to further strengthen its internal oversight mechanisms and capacity, and to regularly share best practices and lessons learned with other organizations and Member States and other UN institutions. This will facilitate the development of more effective prevention strategies and response mechanisms among these organizations and the Member States. Such activities must also adopt a gender-responsive perspective, acknowledging that SEAH is deeply rooted in power imbalances and gender inequality.

We also emphasize the need for robust and regular monitoring and evaluation of implemented measures, with clear indicators to track progress and identify areas requiring additional attention. The results of these assessments should be exchanged transparently with other relevant organizations and Member States.

Looking ahead, we call on WHO to further strengthen cooperation with Member States and coordination with other UN agencies and international organizations to ensure consistency in approaches to preventing and responding to SEAH.

In closing, we reaffirm our zero-tolerance policy for inaction toward sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, not only in paper but also in practice. We stand ready to work with WHO and all Member States to strengthen our collective response to this critical issue. We express our support for the victims and survivors, and once again our admiration for their courage.

Thank you.