

Statement of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse – Putting Victims’ Rights and Dignity at the Forefront

Today marks four years since the High-level Meeting on the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, when I called on world leaders to stand with the United Nations to put an end to this scourge.

Member States and the United Nations together pledged to strengthen the Organization’s effectiveness in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and to put the rights and dignity of victims at the centre of our efforts.

To this end, I appointed the first United Nations Victims’ Rights Advocate, who has integrated a victims’ rights approach across the United Nations system. Since that High-Level meeting, critical support has been provided by the Members of the Circle of Leadership, and by Member States that have signed the Voluntary Compact and/or contributed to the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

The appointment of the first field advocates in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan have demonstrated that a dedicated and trusted person on the ground can make a real difference for victims and survivors.

They have coordinated urgent medical care and psychosocial support; secured access to legal aid to resolve paternity claims; and arranged livelihood support for victims and their children, including through projects financed by the Trust Fund. Field advocates have been embedded in internal United Nations investigations to reassure victims and survivors.

Four years on, we know that to make zero tolerance a reality and eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse, we must address its root causes.

We also need to expand the network of system-wide advocates across our peace, humanitarian and development programmes; create an enabling environment to encourage victims to come forward; and provide access to quality support and services.

Member States must also uphold their obligations by addressing allegations referred by the United Nations to national authorities, holding perpetrators accountable, and resolving paternity claims.

Progress over the past four years provides clear lessons for the future. Above all, we must be vigilant and spare no effort to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and uphold the rights and dignity of victims.

New York, 18 September 2021