



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

15 January 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to share with you the results of the “Safe Space: Survey on Sexual Harassment in our Workplace”, which will also be available on iSeek. For the United Nations system, this was the first survey of its kind. More than 30 organizations across the United Nations family participated, demonstrating our common resolve to eradicate sexual harassment and ensure a safe workplace.

I would like to thank each of you who took the time to participate in this vital initiative. Your responses have contributed to our further understanding of the prevalence, nature and experience of sexual harassment across the United Nations system, and will be used to adapt our strategies going forward.

The response rate overall, however, was moderately low. This tells me two things: first – that we still have a long way to go before we are able to fully and openly discuss sexual harassment; and second – that there may also be an ongoing sense of mistrust, perceptions of inaction and lack of accountability. I hope that this survey, along with the various measures we have taken in recent months, is a first step to addressing this.

Since taking office, I have emphasized my personal commitment to a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment as well as my determination to strengthen our prevention and response efforts. The “Safe Space” report contains some sobering statistics and evidence of what needs to change to make a harassment-free workplace real for all of us. One third of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment in the last two years, with a slightly higher number reporting that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their time at the United Nations. While these figures are comparable to other organizations, we cannot comfort ourselves with the idea that we are all struggling to address this scourge. As an organization founded on equality, dignity and human rights, we must lead by example and set the standard.

All United Nations Staff Members

Moreover, the results confirm that this issue has a debilitating effect on staff morale and work performance, and that there are continued barriers to reporting, including a fear of retaliation and a perception that perpetrators, for the most part, enjoy impunity. We must also do more to address the vulnerability of specific groups within the Organization, including young people, junior staff, those who identify as LGBTQI, and short-term staff.

We can draw some encouragement from those aspects of the Survey indicating that our actions are having an impact. This shows that reporting matters. I urge all of you to report harassment when you see it. I also reiterate my call on senior managers to lead by example. In that spirit, I convened a senior-level Task Force within the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to strengthen and harmonize our efforts. In its first year of operation, the Task Force has delivered concrete improvements, including the first system-wide model policy on sexual harassment and a screening database that prevents the re-hire of those who have perpetrated sexual harassment while employed in the system. Significant steps have also been taken to strengthen our system-wide investigative capacity, to accelerate investigations and to ensure that they are victim-focused.

In the Secretariat, we have intensified communication, reinforced support to victims and witnesses, and strengthened investigation capacity. The Speak Up helpline (1-917-367-8910; speakup@un.org) is a 24-hour resource, providing information on protection, support and reporting mechanisms. I encourage you to make use of it. The Office of Internal Oversight Services, for its part, has implemented a fast-tracked procedure to receive, process and address sexual harassment complaints, and a specialized team has been recruited for sexual harassment investigations.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of the survey is the way in which exclusion and incivility are highly correlated with incidents of harassment, providing a permissive environment for such behaviour. We must jointly nurture an institutional shift, and foster a workplace that is inclusive, where accountability is consistent, where power is never abused and where there is no fear of retaliation. Managers, staff and senior leadership alike are responsible for creating a safe place to work, where diversity is cherished and rights are respected.

In this new year, I count on your continued support to make zero-tolerance our shared experience and to enable all staff to perform to their very best the vital work we do for the world's people.

Any questions concerning the survey may be directed to safespace@un.org. Thank you again for your commitment to our United Nations.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest personal regards,



António Guterres