Upholding Our Values
Putting Victims at the Centre

By JANE CONNORS

United Nations Assistant Secretary-General Jane Connors (third from left) concluded a five-day visit to South Sudan in Juba on 7 December 2017. During her visit, Ms. Connors met with representatives of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, UN agencies, funds and programmes, non-governmental organizations and other partners, including government institutions and civil society, to build support networks and help ensure the provision of remedies for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.

“Sexual exploitation and abuse has no place in our world. It is a global menace and it must end. ... We will not tolerate anyone committing or condoning sexual exploitation and abuse. We will not let anyone cover up these crimes with the UN. Every victim deserves justice and our full support.”

Secretary-General António Guterres, address to the High-level Meeting on the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
New York, 18 September 2017

The majority of the thousands of women and men who work for the United Nations uphold the values of the Charter and serve with pride and professionalism, often in dangerous or difficult settings. But every allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse involving our personnel undermines these values and principles. Each diverts attention and resources from the Organization’s purpose of maintaining peace and security, and promoting and protecting human rights and sustainable development for all. It also erodes the trust of individuals the United Nations seeks to serve.

The Secretary-General is adamant that no one serving under the United Nations flag should be associated with sexual exploitation and abuse. His system-wide strategy, launched in 2017, is transforming the Organization’s approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation. This strategy prioritizes the rights and dignity of victims and focuses on combating impunity, building a multi-stakeholder network of support, and reorienting our approach to strategic communication towards transparency and raising awareness of sexual exploitation and abuse worldwide.

JANE CONNORS is the first Victims’ Rights Advocate for the United Nations.
Sexual exploitation and abuse damage the reputation and credibility of the Organization and its personnel, but for victims this abhorrent conduct has life-changing impact.

To be successful, our work to confront sexual exploitation and abuse must be linked to the main purposes of the United Nations: the maintenance of international peace and security, promotion and protection of human rights, and the achievement of sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides the means to address the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse. It establishes an overarching framework, defining international, regional and national development priorities, and encompasses the broad and interlinked objectives of the United Nations. This people-centred agenda prioritizes the dignity of human beings and pledges to leave no one behind.

Delivering on the Agenda’s 17 goals and related targets, particularly the attainment of gender equality and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, and access to justice for all, requires that the root causes of violence, marginalization and discrimination be addressed. It also requires us to remove the barriers that exclude people, particularly the most vulnerable, from being part of processes that affect their lives, thus allowing them to exercise their human rights and develop their potential.

The Secretary-General’s development reform package, recently approved by Member States, will fundamentally transform the mechanisms, capacities and operations of the United Nations on the ground. A victim-centred approach must be integrated into this new architecture for sustainable development. As United Nations personnel, we must ensure that those we have pledged to serve and assist are free from sexual exploitation and abuse. Together, we must support victims to become survivors.