

# CONVERSATIONS WITH RC/HCs: BEST PRACTICE SERIES



Brian Gleeson

## Libya RC Brian Gleeson on Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel

Brian Gleeson is currently the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and UNDP Resident Representative for Libya. Previously, he served as Senior Adviser in the Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery in UNDP New York and the Director of Human Resources for UNDP New York, managing over 150 human resource staff at regional locations.

**BEST PRACTICE:** In February 2009, RC Brian Gleeson hosted a learning event for senior management of the Libya UN Country Team (UNCT) and NGO government partners on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) by UN, NGO and IGO personnel, with support from the *ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on PSEA*. During this learning event, Gleeson stressed that the lack of appropriate response mechanisms in Libya has most likely prevented incidents of SEA from being reported. He emphasized his commitment to leading efforts to scale up PSEA efforts in Libya and urged everyone present to join him in taking “concrete actions” to move forward. RC Gleeson reflects on issues related to SEA in a development context such as Libya, and offers some thoughts about how to improve PSEA efforts around the world in an interview in April 2009.

### *Libya is a development setting hosting a relatively small number of UN agencies and NGOs. Are there lessons from Libya that might be relevant to other countries around the world?*

According to RC Brian Gleeson, an important lesson from Libya is that those working in development settings often consider SEA to be a problem occurring only in humanitarian and peacekeeping settings. However, as a result of having worked in more than 80 countries around the globe, Gleeson knows well that **SEA exists in development as well as conflict and humanitarian contexts**. In Libya, Gleeson has committed himself to undoing the dangerous assumption that SEA is only a “conflict” or “peacekeeping” issue, thus setting an example for RCs in developing countries to follow.

Another lesson from Libya is **not to assume that SEA does not exist because there are no reports**. Most of UN and NGO personnel in Libya are nationals. Islam, the national religion, provides strict rules on issues such as sexual behaviour; for this reason people are often reluctant to acknowledge that sexual exploitation and abuse might be a problem in the country. Gleeson sees this “tradition of silence” not as an obstacle but as a

motivation for the United Nations to take up leadership in addressing SEA. In his words: “**while we need to be sensitive to culture, we also need to ensure that culture and religion are not used as a defence**; we must fulfil our mandated role in protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.”

In this respect, Libya is a model for a country where the United Nations is operating by government invitation and with the government fully financing most UN operations by showing how to work together with, and sometimes challenge, government and civil society partners to join UN efforts to protect from and respond to SEA. By inviting key UN, NGO and government partners to the senior managers learning event, Gleeson set the stage for ongoing collaboration.

Libya also provides a lesson about developing strategies to allocate technical and financial resources to PSEA when a UN Country Team is small. A common concern of agencies with few personnel is that they do not have enough staff capacity for a dedicated PSEA focal point. Gleeson is encouraging small-staffed agencies in Libya to share a PSEA focal point across two or three agencies, which he considers “a must” in small countries.

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## *What specific steps is RC Gleeson prioritizing to address SEA in Libya?*

“Hosting a **learning event for senior managers** is only the beginning of a dedicated process,” says Gleeson. The next step is to follow up on key action points identified during the learning event, not only by **developing a time frame and budget for implementing the action points**, but also by **establishing an in-country network of trained focal points**.

These focal points, under the guidance of and in collaboration with senior managers, will conduct awareness-raising events for UN personnel and partners. They will also develop reporting systems within the agencies and in communities where the United Nations and its partners work.

The Focal Point Network and/or designated researchers will also lead **an assessment on SEA** in order to gather basic information about the nature and scope of the issue amongst particularly vulnerable communities in Libya, and they will map agencies’ codes of conduct, agreements with contractors and extent of engagement with the local population. This assessment will serve Gleeson, senior managers and PSEA focal points as a basis to develop long-term strategies.

In addition, Gleeson is planning to host **a meeting for all UN staff where he will stress the importance of addressing SEA**; the meeting will be complemented by the launch of an e-mail communications account for UN, NGO and government partners that will regularly distribute PSEA tools and resources.

Gleeson’s leadership will not stop here: he will ensure that the existing UN Gender Theme Group coordinates its activities with the Focal Point Network in order to maximize resources within Libya’s relatively small UN Country Team.

## *What other measures does Gleeson advocate be undertaken globally to assist senior managers to fulfill their PSEA responsibilities?*

While Gleeson acknowledges that the senior managers learning event is useful for providing key PSEA information and stimulating action-planning – and that it should therefore be rolled out globally under the leadership of RCs/HCs – he emphasizes that follow-up is needed to guarantee management accountability. Gleeson **suggests that all senior managers have PSEA as a key result in established performance appraisals** and that reporting and monitoring of performance indicators should be ongoing, rather than at the end of the year “when it’s too late.”

Gleeson further recommends a standard orientation programme for all staff where the RC/HC would give a talk on PSEA: this would **send a powerful message about high-level commitment**. He would like to see an accountability compact within UN Country Teams to ensure that senior managers and other staff “do not hide under the UN flag.”

Gleeson believes that a regional director’s team might be ideally situated to support coordination and accountability at the country level. He anticipates hosting a meeting amongst directors in his region in order to pilot an initiative aimed at developing a 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of accountability.

*In most countries, delivery of the senior managers learning event has been paired with a training for PSEA focal points so that both the senior and working levels understand and can begin to undertake their PSEA responsibilities.*

*For more information about hosting a senior managers or focal point training in your duty station or other PSEA efforts, contact [seatf@un.org](mailto:seatf@un.org) or find the training packages at [www.un.org/pseataskforce/tools.shtml](http://www.un.org/pseataskforce/tools.shtml).*

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