



Executive Director's Circular (Human Resources Division)

Date: 25 April 2003
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Revises:
Amends:
Supersedes:

<p><i>Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Humanitarian Crises and other Operations</i></p>

1. As you may be aware, serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers in West Africa were made in March 2002.
2. All UN system organisations including WFP have a duty of care to beneficiaries which includes a responsibility to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect and that proper standards of behaviour are observed. As a result, in April 2002, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) established a Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises and Other Operations, with WFP as an active participant.
3. One of the mandates of the Task Force was to prepare core principles on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises and other operations. I am pleased to share with you these core principles, which have been endorsed by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.</i>• <i>Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.</i>• <i>Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.</i> |
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- *Sexual relationships between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.*
- *Where a humanitarian worker develops concern or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not s/he must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.*
- *Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems that maintain this environment.*

4. I would like to stress that WFP takes this issue very seriously and that all staff are expected to follow the above core principles and conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of integrity set out in the United Nations Charter, the relevant Standards of Conduct and the applicable Staff Rules and Regulations.

5. WFP has a zero-tolerance policy toward the sexual abuse and exploitation of beneficiaries in humanitarian crises and other operations or any other form of abuse and exploitation by its staff. Such behaviour is unacceptable and will be dealt with by disciplinary action up to and including termination.

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