



United Nations
Victims' Rights
Advocate



GANHRI

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

Guide for National Human Rights Institutions

Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate
Partnership with the Global Alliance of
National Human Rights Institutions

What we do

The Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate (OVRA) supports the mandate of the Victims' Rights Advocate in putting the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel at the forefront of the Organizations' prevention and response efforts. The mandate covers the entire United Nations system which means that we work together with all its entities so that victims get the assistance and support they need.

Partnerships play a key role in OVRA's efforts to uphold the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. OVRA works in collaboration with Government institutions, civil society, including human rights organizations to provide assistance and support to victims in line with the [Secretary-General's strategy and the United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel](#) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. The OVRA supports the preparation and conduct of visits by the VRA to countries where the United Nations is present to gain a first-hand understanding of how sexual exploitation and abuse are addressed. During visits, the VRA connects with victims directly to hear and learn from them so the design of prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse is centered around victims' needs.

How we work

To bolster support to victims in the field, Senior Victims' Rights Officers and Field Victims' Rights Advocates are in place in four countries and serve as the main point of contact for victims on the ground.¹ They seek to ensure that a victim-centered, gender- and child-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach is integrated into the United Nations support for victims. They maintain regular communication and follow up with victims through mobile phones, email and hotlines which are also available in the local language. They conduct outreach and awareness-raising sessions, and facilitate victims' access to services, including medical assistance, psychosocial support and legal aid. They are also involved in facilitating the resolution of paternity and child maintenance claims of children born of sexual exploitation and abuse, and in developing livelihood projects supported by the [Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#).

¹ In the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti and South Sudan.

Partnership with national human rights institutions

OVRA is seeking to engage in partnerships with national human rights institutions through the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) for the benefit of victims. GANHRI and national human rights institutions are well placed to support the Victims' Rights Advocate's mandate on the ground: they can facilitate access to appropriate and quality legal aid for victims; in their countries of origin, assist with strengthening reporting and referral mechanisms for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, contribute to training and awareness-raising activities for staff of national human rights institutions and gender-based service providers, and push for laws, policies and programmes in support of victims.

■ National human rights institutions can:

Facilitate access to legal aid

- **Provide** names of lawyers or legal aid organizations willing to offer pro bono legal support to victims in their respective countries, for inclusion in a roster maintained by OVRA.²
- **Facilitate** legal processes, including in relation to paternity and child support and maintenance claims straddling different jurisdictions.

Develop reporting mechanisms

- **Establish** a mechanism and adopt standard operating procedures to transmit complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by United Nations personnel to the United Nations through the OVRA, and play a role in pushing the Government and the United Nations to promptly investigate the allegations and take remedial action.
- **Support** the establishment and sustainability of local community-based complaints mechanisms.

² These lawyers should be admitted to practise law in their respective national jurisdictions and be in good standing. They should have knowledge and expertise in civil and/or criminal legal proceedings related to sexual exploitation and abuse, including the resolution of paternity and child maintenance claims.

Conduct joint training and awareness-raising session

- **Benefit** from webinars convened by OVRA on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel, applicable procedures, and the Secretary-General's policies in these areas.
- **Collaborate** with OVRA to jointly raise awareness at the national and local level of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel, including by conducting trainings on a victims' rights approach to addressing sexual exploitation and abuse for local gender-based violence service providers.
- **Collaborate** with OVRA and GANHRI in training programmes for United Nations uniformed personnel prior to their deployment to United Nations peace operations or special political missions.

Advocacy

- **Advocate** on behalf of victims and encourage States to support resolution of longstanding cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- **Lobby** for laws, policies and programmes in support of victims of sexual exploitation or abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. National human rights institutions can champion the introduction of legislation providing extra-territorial jurisdiction for sexual exploitation and abuse. They could also push for inclusion of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel in national programmes for victims of gender-based violence.

Cooperation in focus: Haiti

The Ombudspersons' Office in Haiti is part of the Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force led by the United Nations in the country and leads efforts to give a voice to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. It established a nationwide complaint and referral mechanisms and is part of the referral network that assists victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. It has offices in remote areas, including where the United Nations might not be present. Cases reported to the Ombudsperson's office are referred to the OVRA. In Haiti, there are many outstanding paternity and child support claims. The Ombudsperson's Office in Haiti together with the Field Victims' Rights Advocate interact with national human rights institutions based in the countries of origin of the fathers to facilitate these claims.

Contact

Are you interested in partnering with OVRA?

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' We count on all national human rights institutions in strengthening our collective efforts to uphold the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse.'

Jane Connors

Victims' Rights Advocate