

What cultural change is needed to consign sexual harassment to the dustbin of history?

CSW 63 - SIDE EVENT

VENUE: ECOSOC Chamber

19 MARCH 2019 - 11:30AM - 12:45 PM

Background and Purpose

Workplaces, cities and universities have witnessed an unprecedented global challenge to sexual harassment. Women from every region have taken to the streets and grasped the power of social media to expose their pain and harm, including through use of the hashtags #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, #BalanceTonPorc, #PrimeiroAssedio, #Babaeko and #WithYou. Started by Tarana Burke in 2006, the Me Too movement has changed conversations and actions—respect for women’s voices is growing and some perpetrators are being held to account: the power to harass has been profoundly challenged. At the same time, there is resistance to these changes from those who wish to see cultural norms that protect power and privilege kept intact.

The movement has addressed inequality through an intersectional lens reminding us that race, age, disability, sexual orientation, class and other characteristics shape the variety of women’s experiences. It has put the spotlight on several sectors—including politics, media, civil society, sports, and the aid sector. It has also reminded us that no workplace is immune from sexual harassment and that it remains apparently ubiquitous.

The Secretary-General has made addressing sexual harassment a top priority, emphasizing that “sexual harassment, like sexual abuse and sexual violence, is rooted in historic power imbalances” and a male-dominated culture in the workplace. Over the past year, the UN progressed several initiatives to address sexual harassment—new policies, codes of conduct and a General Assembly resolution.

It is time to project into the future and reflect on the world we want to build together. Large scale transformation is essential if sexual harassment is truly to be eliminated: hence the focus on cultural change

Ensuring the safety of women and girls in private and public spaces is a foundational aspect of gender equality and is at the core of UN Women’s mandate and work. UN Women supports efforts to prevent and respond to violence (a form and expression of sex discrimination), to increase access to services for survivors and hasten the end of impunity for perpetrators. The agreed draft conclusions of the 63rd CSW refers to the quality of specific services as central to the transformation of unequal power relations and

recommends the transformation of public services for gender equality and women’s empowerment to “ensure that public services are of adequate quality, gender-responsive, age-sensitive and disability-sensitive, culturally relevant and physically accessible for older women and women with disabilities, and free from violence, stigma and sexual harassment.

These efforts are framed by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and aligned with the Future We Want described in the 2030 Agenda. They contribute towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 4, 5, 11 and 16.

Methodology

The question “What cultural change is needed to consign sexual harassment to the dustbin of history?” will be shared with the panelists one month prior to the event so that they can prepare a 1-page answer in writing. Two weeks before the event, a global conversation will be opened on the CSW twitter account addressing the question with the general public. A group of experts—scholars, victim-survivors and others—will also be invited to contribute to the conversation. A selection of responses will be shared during the event.

Panelists and meeting participants will have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Contributions on the nature of cultural change will provide the basis for a publication.

Event Format

- The event will be moderated by UN Women Executive Coordinator on Sexual Harassment, Ms. Purna Sen.
- The event will open with victim-survivor voices that highlight their experience and knowledge.
- Seven panelists will make 5-minute interventions on the cultural change that will end sexual harassment.
- Time will also be allocated for non-panellist audience members to address the question.

Audience and Participants

- The event will be open to all CSW participants including representatives of Member States, the United Nations system and accredited civil society representatives
- The event will be broadcast online in English
- UN Women will provide media coverage and manage a twitter conversation until the event
- Panellists will include the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, Equality Now, Australia Human Rights Committee, Member of Parliament from Georgia, Under-Secretary-General for Management/Chair of the CEB Task Force on addressing sexual harassment, a representative from the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Sexual Harassment and victim-survivor advocates.