

**DECLARATION BY BELGIUM ON THE OCCASION OF THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON COMBATING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE**

NEW YORK, 18 SEPTEMBER 2017

Belgium thanks the United Nations Secretary General for organizing this important high-level meeting on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The United Nations and its Member States perform valuable work in conflict areas through the various operations on the ground in support of peace and security, the humanitarian needs of the local population and the promotion and protection of human rights and sustainable development. The protection of civilian populations and the weakest in society must be our starting point.

Therefore, it is essential that United Nations peacekeeping personnel adheres to the highest ethical standards of conduct. Belgium supports the Secretary General's zero tolerance policy and his commitment to make the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse by UN mission personnel a priority. Preventing and ensuring accountability for such misconduct is essential for the credibility of the United Nations.

Belgium particularly supports the Secretary General's determination to pursue a more balanced relationship between men and women in peacekeeping operations. A higher number of women is also essential to prevent abuse. The rights of victims and the fight against impunity for such misconduct should be given greater attention.

At domestic level, Belgium has strengthened its legislative arsenal over the years to meet the highest standards for both preventive and repressive action. At international level, Belgium is actively involved in strengthening and implementing relevant UN policy, including through its participation in various peace operations.

In that regard, Belgium fully subscribes the United Nations Compact on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, in which the UN and Member States contributing mission personnel take concrete commitments with regard to the prevention and punishment of sexual misconduct.

Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel has committed himself personally to this issue. He shows his solidarity with the Secretary General and has joined the Circle of Leadership on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Operations. The Prime Minister wishes to keep this issue high on the international agenda and will raise it in his contacts with other Member States to join forces in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.