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To: All Staff Members

From: Mark Malloch Brown

Subject: **Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in Humanitarian Crisis**

As you may be aware, earlier this year there were serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers in West Africa.

UNDP and UN system organizations have a duty of care to beneficiaries - which includes a responsibility to ensure that they are treated with dignity and respect and that certain minimum 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 Crisis, with UNDP an active participant.

One of the mandates of the Task Force was to prepare core principles on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crisis. I am today pleased to share with you these core principles that have now been endorsed by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee:

- *Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts on gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination on employment;*
- *Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken believe in the age of a child is not a defense;*
- *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.*

1 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is comprised of both members (FAO, OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO) and standing invitees (ICRC, ICVA, IFRC, InterAction OIM, SCHR, RSG/IDPs, UNHCHR, and the World Bank). ICRC, a standing invitee, maintains its independence from policy statements issued by the IASC and its subsidiary bodies.

- *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 on humanitarian aid work.*
- *Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns 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.*

I would like to stress that I take this issue very seriously and I expect all UNDP staff 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 Standards of Conduct for all International Civil Servants and the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules.

UNDP will uphold a zero-tolerance policy toward the sexual abuse and exploitation of women and children in humanitarian crisis, or any other form of abuse and exploitation by its staff. Such behaviour is unacceptable and will be dealt with seriously by disciplinary action, up to and including termination.