



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

11 August 2011

Dear Ms. Kondracki,

I write to thank you most sincerely for your letter of 1 August 2011 and for sending me a copy of the film for my personal viewing.

Last week, I saw the film along with my senior advisers. I was pained by what I saw. I was also saddened by the involvement of the international community, particularly of the United Nations, in the abuses connected with the trafficking of women and their use as sex slaves, as highlighted in the movie.

Despite strenuous efforts by the United Nations, Member States and other organizations, the trafficking of women and their abuse continues to be a blight on humanity and on our conscience.

The United Nations was present in Bosnia-Herzegovina for about a decade. Working closely with several international institutions, we tried to bring peace to the country and the adjoining region. Within the mandate given to us, there were many tasks required of the United Nations, some of which it did well, others it could have done better. Your film points to one area where our work left questions behind.

It is important to point out some of the steps the Organization has taken since those dark events in Bosnia of the late 1990s. Foremost, is the strong reflection within the Organization of the need to look seriously at the treatment of women and children in conflict situations, an exercise begun by my predecessor. The Security Council has also taken an unequivocal stance on this issue. Some key measures are: (i) the consolidation of several entities in the United Nations working on issues affecting women into UN Women; (ii) the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and, (iii) the strengthened mandates of the agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights.

Ms. Larysa Kondracki
Writer - Director
New York

Other pertinent internal reforms have also been taken to address directly the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse in the context of United Nations peacekeeping operations, which will help reduce the risk of criminal wrongdoing and other inappropriate conduct. Conduct and Discipline Units have been placed in each peacekeeping operation, a dialogue with Member States has established stricter standards for recruiting personnel; and violations of codes of conduct are seriously followed up by the Heads of the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Service.

The efforts of the Office of Investigation and Oversight Services as well as the Ombudsman have brought matters related to sexual abuse clearly within their official purview. Due protections are firmly in place for those who “blow the whistle”.


But, I recognize, rules and measures alone are insufficient. The culture must change. I am determined to lead by example. At the United Nations we shall recommit to the fundamental tenets of international public service. Following an internal review a few years ago, a zero tolerance policy has been instituted for United Nations peacekeepers with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse. The United Nations is constantly working together with member states to meet these challenges and to establish criminal accountability for all crimes committed by its staff and other personnel serving in its peacekeeping operations.

For this reason, I welcome your suggestion that *The Whistleblower* be screened especially for United Nations senior staff. I propose to go further. I have asked that a special screening be arranged at United Nations Headquarters not only for staff but also for Member States, with the full support of the President of the General Assembly. As suggested by you, after the screening, we shall have a panel discussion as the starting point for a frank and honest discussion of the issues the film raises. I hope you will be able to join in this engagement.

I shall also be discussing my policies with senior staff in the field, underlining the seriousness with which instances of sexual exploitation must be taken. My senior leadership has heard this message from me before. I believe they share my sense of urgency on the issues raised in your film and other related concerns. I want to assure you that we shall embrace the challenge your film places before the United Nations.

Notwithstanding the complexities of making peace, the United Nations is committed to pursue the tasks given to it by the Charter. Today, the concerns of the voiceless and defenceless of the world are at the centre of our work. The vulnerable women whose condition your film showcases will not be forgotten. Thank you for raising this important issue with such passion.

Yours sincerely,



BAN/Ki-moon