

**Press Statement – Nepal, 8 July 2020:** The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health, social and economic crisis. International partners, civil society and humanitarian organizations are working together to support the Government of Nepal’s response.

All actors involved in the COVID-19 response need to continue to respect the right of all people, especially women and girls, youth, minorities and marginalised groups, to be safe from discrimination, sexual exploitation and abuse while receiving assistance, including as they stay at quarantine and isolation centres or receive health services and treatment.

As seen in previous crises, women and children in particular face heightened risks. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Between 11 March and 6 June 2020, 624 cases of violence against women and girls were reported. Indeed, there have been concerning allegations of sexual abuse in quarantine centres, places where women should feel safe to spend their quarantine before returning to their families and their community. We must have zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse, we must treat every allegation seriously and pursue appropriate action to resolve it.

In cases where sexual exploitation or abuse does occur, it is essential that victims have access to safe and confidential reporting channels and services, as well as to justice and legal remedy. When children are victims, the approach must consider the best interest of the child and engage with the family and caregivers as appropriate.

Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse must be integrated into the response to COVID-19 as a central part of coordinated humanitarian action and development assistance. We encourage everyone engaged in the COVID-19 response – Government, private sector, civil society, communities, frontline workers, security forces and volunteers – to respect and protect those who are vulnerable and marginalized, and create a safe environment for both the service users and providers without fear of sexual exploitation and abuse. The responsibility to end gender-based violence lies with all of us, families, religious and political leaders, the police, civil society, the judicial committees, the justice system, and with the press.

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*Issued by:*

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