



WELCOME NOTE



This special Women's edition of the CDT Connect newsletter highlights a fundamental truth: **lasting peace and sustainable security are inseparable from the inclusion, protection, and full participation of women.**

Women, whether in uniform, like our courageous female peacekeepers, or active in civil society, politics, or youth leadership, are essential agents of social transformation. Their direct engagement strengthens community trust, enhances the protection of civilians - especially women and girls, who are often the most vulnerable - and makes our peacekeeping operations more effective and gender-responsive.

Their unique perspectives lead to better identification of and more effective responses to the specific needs of survivors of gender-based violence, while also reducing the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse.

In this context, our Mission is implementing concrete initiatives. We actively support women mediators' platforms and leadership programs to strengthen their skills and autonomy. Targeted training is provided to both uniformed and civilian personnel on the Code of Conduct and violence prevention. We are also enhancing reporting mechanisms and victim support systems, while launching programs such as positive masculinity to help transform social norms. This momentum is made possible through vital and strategically integrated collaboration between the Gender Affairs Section and other sections such as the Conduct and Discipline Team. Such synergy is fundamental to preventing all forms of violence. Likewise, the integrity and exemplary conduct of each Mission member are essential pillars for building public trust and reinforcing the credibility of our mandate. Ethical behavior is a non-negotiable condition for our positive impact, contributing to women's empowerment and participation beyond mere physical protection.

Ultimately, this special edition of the CDT Connect newsletter reminds us of our collective responsibility and commitment to building a world where security and justice are a reality for all. Let us honor the courage of the women who work for peace and unite in making gender equality the foundation of every decision that shapes the future.

Mireille Laurier Affa'a Mindzie
Senior Gender Affairs Officer

IN THE FIELD

**With
Deborah Barugahara
Assistant Conduct and Discipline
Officer**



“Maman Deborah, I got my diploma!”

Let me share an experience that deeply shaped my commitment as a Conduct and Discipline Officer. In 2018, a grandmother in Kisangani reported a case of sexual exploitation and abuse involving her daughter and a peacekeeper. The daughter, only a teenager at the time of the abuse, had given birth and later disappeared, leaving the grandmother to raise the boy, even breastfeeding him herself out of love and resilience. The abuse tore their lives apart: the young mother dropped out of school, and the grandmother's marriage ended due to stigma. Sadly, the case could not proceed without the mother's testimony. But the boy's strength stayed with me. I personally supported his school fees for two years, and later, the Trust Fund covered his final year of high school and first year of university.

I'll never forget the day he called me, crying: “Maman Deborah, I got my diploma!”

I cried with him. That moment reminded me why this work matters.

How would you describe your mission ?

As an Assistant Conduct and Discipline Officer, I work to ensure that all personnel are aware of the United Nations' rules, core values, and the MONUSCO Code of Conduct. My role is both preventive and responsive: I conduct training and outreach activities to prevent misconduct, including Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority, and I also manage allegations when they arise. This involves receiving, assessing, and referring cases for investigation.

A key part of my mission is to support and protect victims by ensuring that they are referred to appropriate medical and psychological services.

Why as a Conduct and Discipline Officer you engage with members of the host population?

It is essential to strengthen outreach efforts directed toward local communities to ensure a clear understanding of UN standards of conduct, particularly the strict prohibition of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel. As part of these efforts, we also inform members of the local populations about MONUSCO's community-based complaint reception mechanisms and we raise awareness on the support available to victims of sexual misconduct perpetrated by UN personnel.

How could the UN better assist victims of sexual exploitation and abuse?

A concrete measure would be to improve support for children born as a result of sexual exploitation and abuse, particularly in securing access to education. This concern is consistently raised by victims, who emphasize the importance of ensuring their children can attend school—ideally through the secondary level. Facilitating educational opportunities not only benefits the children directly but also contributes to restoring dignity and hope for the victims and their families.

IN THE FIELD

With
Deborah Barugahara
Assistant Conduct and Discipline Officer

If you had one message to share with mission personnel: what would you like colleagues to know?

As Conduct and Discipline Officers, our role requires us to engage with both sides of reported wrongdoing: the colleague alleged to have committed misconduct, and the colleague or member of the local community who reportedly was affected by it. It is essential that all parties understand that, as a Conduct and Discipline Officer, I do not take sides. My responsibility is to ensure that the rules and procedures governing the handling of misconduct complaints are applied fairly, consistently, and with integrity. When an allegation is brought to my attention, I have a duty to act - guided by the principles of accountability and justice - to ensure that those who have breached UN standards of conduct are held responsible.



And finally, what message would you like to share with Congolese women and female peacekeepers?

To Congolese women: MONUSCO is entrusted with the protection of civilians, with particular attention to the most vulnerable- especially women and children. Any act of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by MONUSCO personnel constitutes a grave violation of UN standards of conduct. The Mission has a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse. It is essential that such incidents are reported immediately to the Mission via the community-based complaint reception mechanism.

To our female Peacekeepers: Let us unite in the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as all other forms of misconduct. Together, we can lead by example and ensure that the principles of dignity, respect, and integrity are upheld in every aspect of our work.



TRAINED TO PROTECT: A UNPOL PARTNERSHIP STORY (BENI)



***Florence Wakasongo,
Judicial Police Officer, Sexual Violence Prevention and
Protection Unit (EPEPVS)***

“The UNPOL training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse gave me a deeper understanding of the issue and better equipped me to work with children, families, and other actors involved in such cases.”

I serve as a Judicial Police Officer in the EPEPVS unit in Beni. My role includes ensuring the strict application of the law, investigating offenses, referring perpetrators to the Public Prosecutor, educating the public, and, at times, helping to mediate between parties in conflict.

The UNPOL training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse has been a major professional asset. It enhanced my understanding of issues related to sexual violence - both gender-based and conflict-related - and better equipped me to support victims, including children and families, as well as to engage with the various actors involved. One day, a young woman came to our office. She was a survivor of rape that occurred in a rural area of Beni territory. She said the attackers were "armed men who came in the night." Beyond the trauma, she carried the heavy burden of fearing rejection by her community.

The training had taught me how to welcome, listen to, and guide survivors with care. That experience reminded me that our work goes far beyond enforcement - it is about dignity, justice, and healing.

What I learned in that training, I now apply every day in my police work. The collaboration between MONUSCO and the Congolese National Police is very effective, especially in the area of sexual exploitation and abuse prevention. Thanks to this collaboration, we've been able to uncover and address a number of cases involving sexual violence.

The Conduct and Discipline Team of MONUSCO, working alongside community-based complaint networks, has helped to resolve many incidents. These community members are deeply connected to their environments and are often the first to detect signs of abuse or misconduct.

To go further, we must keep raising awareness, continue training, and ensure deeper involvement from local communities.

I also believe joint patrols between MONUSCO and the Congolese police would be a strong tool, helping to fight against the prostitution of minors, identify potential victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, ensure proper support, and bring perpetrators to justice.

For me, it is essential to recognize the global importance of protecting women's rights, which have long been denied. It is also important to celebrate women's achievements and continue pushing toward gender equality.

Peacekeeping reminds us of the sacrifices made by Blue Helmets who have given their lives to protect civilians in conflict zones. As a national partner trained by the United Nations, I believe it also honors the continued dedication of those who serve today.

I am proud to play a part in this shared mission for justice and protection.



WOMEN IN UNIFORM: TO SERVE AND PROTECT



Captain Xitshembiso Confidence Mathebula
Legal Advisor
South African Battalion

“To serve and protect” - for me it means being selfless, it means defending, assisting and safeguarding the locals and protecting their rights and dignity at all times while respecting the home country flag that is attached to the uniform that we wear. We are put in a position of hope and trust, we should not abuse it.”

What motivated you to get involved in the prevention of abuse and serious misconduct in peacekeeping operations?

I come from a humble background, and I had always dreamed of protecting those who cannot protect themselves due to their gender, social background or for any other reasons. As a soldier and military lawyer, maintaining discipline amongst military personnel is something very close to my heart, and being involved in the prevention of abuse and misconduct provides such an opportunity for me.

Could you explain the role of a National Investigation Officer and what it involves daily?

The role of a National Investigating Officer entails working together with the Conduct and Discipline Team and Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in investigating reported cases of both misconduct and incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse carried out by contingents. I assist the OIOS office in locating the subjects in the cases, meeting with victims, and ensuring that cases are finalised as soon as practically possible. Other tasks include training contingent members on preventative measures to combat Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and other military discipline issues.

It is often reported that contingents are dealing with cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, which makes your role within your battalion even more strategic. How do you manage such situations while preserving the integrity of the investigation process and cohesion within your troops?

With experience in a prosecution environment, one must act without fear or favour, favour or prejudice to ensure fairness during investigations. I maintain the integrity of the investigative process by acting in a professional manner, and seeking to uphold the integrity of my office itself. Admittedly, there can be resistance and misunderstanding from troops during the process, but I believe that overall, our troops understand and respect the importance of my role in this place and that makes my job easier. I also strive to make them understand that what I do is for the benefit of our Country, the South African National Defense Force and The United Nations.

What message would you like to share with young girls or women who dream of serving in the military and defending the rights of others?

There are no limits, everything is possible, as a girl, you are allowed to dream big and you are allowed to enter into male dominated space without having to be discriminated, you have the capability to protect those who are unable to protect themselves, you are in a better place to do so due to your nurturing character that you were born with as a woman.

VOICES FROM HEADQUARTERS



Ann Makome

Senior Political Affairs, Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA) - New York

“If we fail to demonstrate to Member States and the countries where we serve that we take sexual exploitation and abuse very seriously, we risk losing their trust and support- and with it, our ability to continue operating effectively, or indeed at all.”

In a few words, how would you describe your role within the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA)?

As the Senior Political Affairs Officer, I serve as the senior technical lead in the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the Response to

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA), working closely with the Special Coordinator and our small yet dedicated team. My role is really about helping the office deliver on its broad, system-wide mandate, which entails following up and ensuring the implementation of all four pillars of the Secretary-General's strategy on sexual exploitation and abuse across the UN system. This includes coordinating efforts across the UN system to implement the strategy, developing policies and guidance, identifying and addressing gaps, and making sure we stay focused on impact. We collaborate closely with the Conduct and Discipline Service (CDS), the Conduct and Discipline Teams (CDTs) in peacekeeping missions, the United Nations agencies, funds and programs that are part of the United Nations Country Team, as well as with international and national non-governmental organizations. It's a mix of policy work, high-level coordination, practical problem-solving, and behind-the-scenes work to keep everything moving. No two days are alike, and that's what makes it interesting.

How does your work contribute to upholding dignity and respect, particularly for women and girls in mission settings?

It's important to note that power imbalances and inequality, especially gender inequality is one of the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse and that most victims are women and girls, although men and boys are also victims. At OSCSEA, we work to strengthen the UN's prevention and response to Sexual exploitation and Abuse, ensuring policies translate into real protection, accountability, and support for victims. However, preventing and responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is just one part of a bigger picture. It must go hand in hand with promoting gender equality, women's rights, participation, and opportunity. Part of our advocacy is to help shift the system so that dignity and respect are not optional- they're embedded into everything we do.

What message would you like to share with peacekeepers working on the frontlines to prevent abuse?

Sexual exploitation and Abuse is an unacceptable abuse of power. It goes against everything we, as the United Nations and as peacekeepers, stand for, and everything peacekeepers are mandated to do, especially the duty to protect those most at risk. Peacekeeping plays a vital role. It still remains one of the most effective tools for protecting civilians, maintaining peace, and helping countries re-establish the rule of law. But SEA not only harms individuals, it also undermines this mission and betrays the trust that communities place in the United Nations. We are often asked why we approach this work with such urgency. My message to peacekeepers is simple: if you see something, say something - because silence makes you complicit. Prevention is everyone's responsibility. Be vigilant, speak up, and take action.



VOICES FROM HEADQUARTERS

With
Ann Makome

Senior Political Affairs, Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving
the Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA) - New York



Some believe that Headquarters structures are sometimes disconnected from realities on the ground. How do you, at OSCSEA, ensure that you stay connected to the needs and challenges faced by missions such as MONUSCO?

It is true that headquarters structures and guidance can be very bureaucratic, complex and disconnected from realities in the field. That is why supporting the implementation of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse in the field and being responsive to the needs of frontline colleagues is a key priority for the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSCSEA).

When the Special Coordinator was appointed in 2022, he was specifically asked to focus on supporting efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse at the country level. This informs everything we do and it's how we ensure our work stays responsive, inclusive, and rooted in the realities of missions like MONUSCO. We know that policy must be practical, context-specific, and grounded in field realities. For the Special Coordinator and for OSCSEA, staying grounded isn't just about listening, it's about acting on what we hear.

For example, we developed the Leadership Toolkit on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in response to requests from senior officials who were clear on their responsibilities but needed concrete, hands-on guidance to implement them effectively.

If you had to name one powerful lesson you've learned from your journey in this field, what would it be?

One of the most powerful lessons I've learned is the importance of patience paired with persistence. Sexual exploitation and abuse is not an easy topic to confront, but it's essential that we do. It demands courage, honesty, and a willingness to listen, even when the conversations are hard. Change doesn't happen overnight - but it does happen when we work together and build a sense of collective responsibility. For me, it's also about culture change-creating a system grounded in dignity, protection, and shared values. We still have a way to go, but I do believe we're making progress. And we have an obligation to victims, the communities that we are mandated to serve and our own staff to keep pushing forward.

CDT IN ACTION – FIELD UPDATES



In coordination with a military medical team, CDT Bunia supported the collection of DNA samples from a victim and a child born of sexual exploitation and abuse.

This action reflects CDT's core mandate: prevent misconduct, support investigations, and assist victims.



BUNIA



On 18 July, the CDT team trained 36 UNPOL officers (10 women, 26 men) in on UN standards of conduct, MONUSCO's Code of Conduct and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). The session also addressed misconduct, including harassment, discrimination, abuse of power and non-fraternization



KINSHASA

CDT IN ACTION – FIELD UPDATES



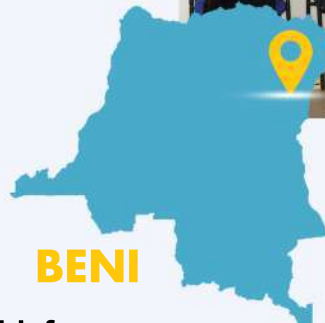
Despite the closure of some MONUSCO offices in South Kivu, the Conduct and Discipline Team remains operational in Bukavu, Uvira and Kavumu.

Victims of sexual exploitation and abuse whose cases were substantiated or whose paternity test results were positive received school fee payments, with support from the Victims' Rights Section and partners.

This demonstrates the Mission's ongoing commitment to supporting victims, even in the context of its progressive withdrawal.



On 21 July, 10 students (9 girls, 1 boy) from Bilingual Christian University of Congo (UCBC) visited MONUSCO Beni for an exchange with representatives from CDT, Political Affairs, Civil Affairs, Justice, Gender, Human Rights, and Public Information. CDT presented its role in promoting ethical conduct.



**CONDUCT &
DISCIPLINE
TEAM**

Welcoming our new Section Chief

We warmly welcome Mr. Thomas Elftmann, who joined as Chief of the Conduct and Discipline Team in Beni in July 2025.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

THE OUTSTANDING ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY BASED COMPLAINT NETWORKS (CBCN) IN BUNIA AND DJUGU TERRITORY



“Before, people in remote areas like ours believed UN staff were above the law because of their immunity. Now we know that’s not true, and we’re passing that knowledge on.”

Ruth Asizu Mungusi, Secretary of the CBCN in Fataki. In Bunia and Djugu territories, in the northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, a network of local volunteers is quietly working to prevent cases of sexual exploitation and abuse linked to the presence of humanitarian or UN personnel. These community actors, organized under the Community-Based Complaint Networks (CBCNs), operate in remote areas such as Drodro,

Rhoo, Gina, Fataki, Komanda, Ameer, Bogoro Tchabi and Bayoo, places where insecurity and crumbling roads make movement a constant challenge. Despite these obstacles, their commitment remains unwavering. With no financial compensation or visibility materials, these volunteers, most of them women, carry out regular awareness-raising activities, share prevention messages, and serve as local watch points within their communities.

Their updates, often accompanied by photos, are shared via WhatsApp with MONUSCO’s Field Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) based in Bunia, who provide them with training and guidance.

Ruth Asizu Mungusi, Secretary of the CBCN in Fataki, one of the most isolated areas, reflects on the value of the training they received: ***“As someone well-known in the community, it pains me to see people fall into harm simply because they lack information. The CDT in Bunia gave us a solid foundation in MONUSCO’s policies on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.”***

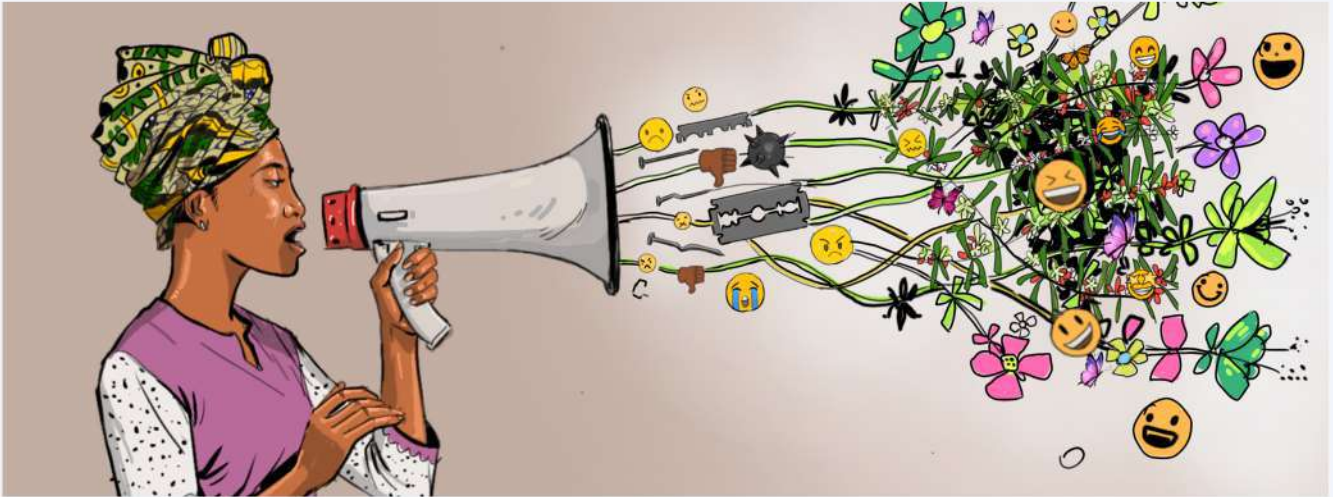
Ruth also acknowledges the many challenges they face: no transport allowances, no outreach materials, limited access to smartphones or mobile data.

Milton Luis Orrego Perez, CDT Team Leader in Bunia, highlights the importance of their contribution: ***“I am impressed by the proactiveness shown by most members of the community-based complaint network, especially the women, who are complying with their task on a purely volunteer-basis. During the training sessions conducted by CDT in Bunia, we emphasize the relevant policies, the available reporting mechanisms, the strict prohibition of sexual relations with minors, and the importance of not making false allegations. In this context, our role is often to provide guidance, as they have already internalized the key messages and they use their initiative to pass the message in line with the UN policy in an impressive manner with very limited material resources.”***

Present where MONUSCO can no longer go, these networks extend the Mission’s reach and quietly build local protection against abuse, without uniforms, without titles, but with steadfast resolve.



WOMEN, LET'S SPEAK UP!



Four courageous, powerful and anonymous testimonies from women who chose to speak up, against harassment, abuse of power and inappropriate behavior.

“That’s how it works here! You’re just an intern!”

I was 22 years old when I started my internship with a United Nations Mission. My family was proud. So was I.

But when I started, I didn’t yet know all the rules. Very quickly, I was faced with a situation that nearly shattered my confidence, even my mental health. My supervisor saw me as “just an intern” with no experience, and he reminded me of it constantly. Even when I proposed ideas, they were automatically dismissed, as if I wasn’t entitled to speak up, as if my voice didn’t matter.

I felt deeply frustrated. I knew I had potential, I could innovate, contribute more.

But my tasks were reduced to making coffee for visitors or sticking posters on walls.

And whenever I asked questions, the answer was always the same: **“That’s how it works here! You’re just an intern!”**

So I stayed silent, afraid it would ruin any chance of being hired later.

But silence took its toll. My body started speaking for me. I had stomach aches, a constant knot in my belly. I was always walking on eggshells.

I lived far away, left home early, and always arrived before my supervisor.

He sometimes didn’t show up until 10 or 11 a.m. And I waited, even in the rain.

One day, after hours of waiting, I walked into a colleague’s office. She saw immediately that something was wrong. As soon as she asked what was going on, I broke down.

I poured my heart out. She listened. She supported me. And she helped me report my supervisor’s abusive behavior.

The director was informed. A meeting was held. The rules were reiterated. My supervisor was called to order.

Since then, the work environment has improved. I feel respected. The following year I got a promotion. And most importantly, I learned a vital lesson:

**Staying silent doesn’t protect you.
Speaking up does!**

“I was scared. Scared of retaliation. Scared of losing my job.”

At the time, I was a United Nations Volunteer.

As you know, volunteers serve for a limited period, after which their assignment ends.

I carried out my tasks with dedication, all while feeling the silent pressure to “prove myself” in hopes of securing a more stable position. This sense of insecurity was obvious to some colleagues. And some didn’t hesitate to remind me: “You’re just a volunteer, not staff.”

Being staff was seen as the ultimate prize. This unspoken hierarchy affected how people interacted with each other.

But the hardest part came when one of my colleagues in a higher position started making advances, dangling the promise of a permanent position.

One day, he said to me: “You are talented, I don’t want to lose you. We could talk about it at my place.”

To make it clear I wasn’t interested, I took precautions.

I dressed plainly, sneakers, jeans, no makeup. Ironically, I thought that would be enough.

I even asked a colleague to drop me off at his house, hoping to show that everything was out in the open, and maybe also to deter him if he had bad intentions.

But he didn’t get the message. He showered me with compliments, then grabbed me by the waist and said, “We could achieve great things together.”

I pushed him away immediately. I told him he was mistaken.

I ran away and didn’t look back, even as he called my name and shouted apologies behind me. I went home in tears. I was scared. Scared of retaliation. Scared of losing my job. But I decided to speak to the colleague who dropped me at his place. He said we should speak to our supervisor. My supervisor listened. He supported me.

He protected me. From then on, I no longer had to endure inappropriate behavior. And I held my head high.

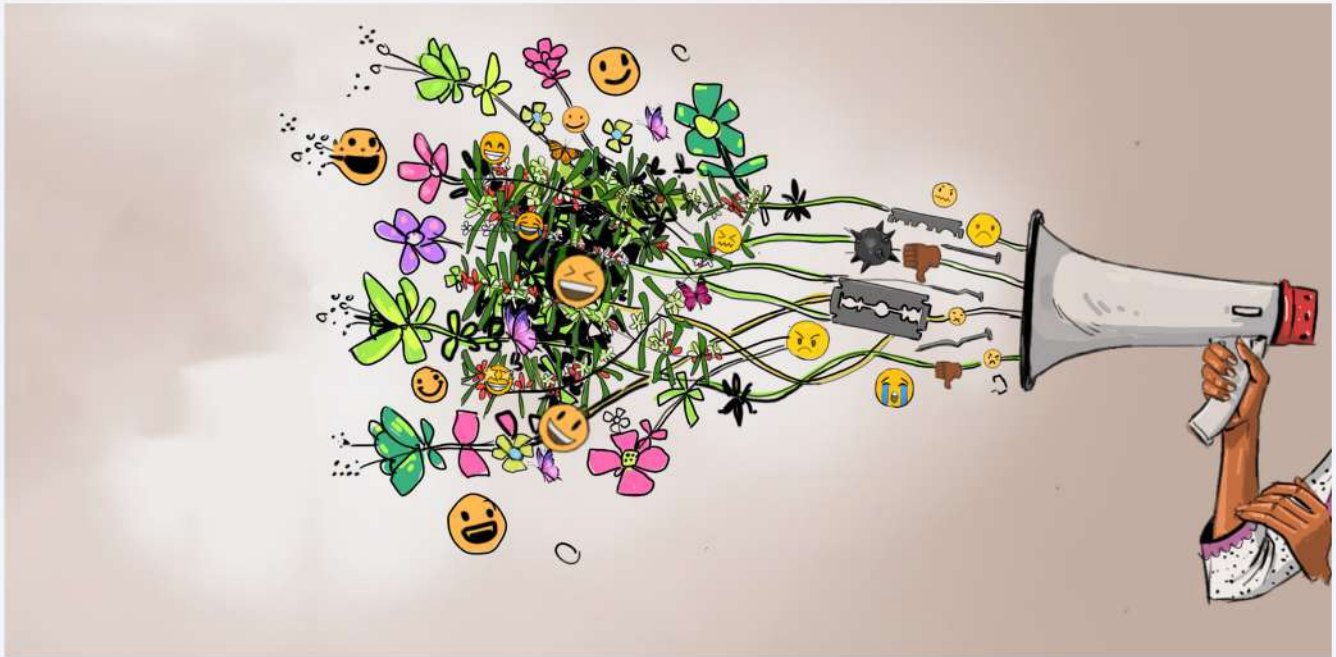
As painful as it was, this experience made me grow. It taught me to know my rights.

It reminded me that even within institutions, some people cross red lines.

But it also showed me that others are there to uphold the rules and protect people.

Silence strengthens those who abuse their power.

WOMEN, LET'S SPEAK UP!



“No, I’m not flirting. I’m just being respectful.”

It started with polite conversation. We worked in the same section, and since he was new, I helped him settle in - showed him where to find things, introduced him to colleagues, invited him to join the team for lunch. I was simply being kind. But soon, he started messaging me outside of work hours.

At first, it was harmless: a thank you, a joke. Then it became daily. “You’re different,” he said. “You make me feel good.” “I like talking to you Baby. I think there’s something between us.”

I was taken aback. I had never shown any romantic interest. I had never touched him, never flirted. I was just being polite, the way I am with everyone. Then he began sending me videos of himself, laying down to bed, working out, eating, topless... I was bombarded. Every day, new clips, endless messages. I told him gently that I didn’t feel the same way. That I just wanted a respectful, professional environment. He accused me of “leading him on.” Of “sending mixed signals.” He said women like me pretend to be kind but really want attention. I started to feel anxious at work. He would stare at me in meetings. He stopped greeting me and became aggressive in his responses. And one day, in front of others, he said: “Be careful with her. She’s charming, but dangerous.” It hurt. I started questioning myself - Was I too nice? Too available? Should I stop being kind to male colleagues? Then I realized: **Kindness is not consent. Respect is not an invitation.** And when someone says NO, even softly, it means NO. I reported what happened. He was spoken to.

Today, I remind everyone, men and women, that consent isn’t only about physical acts. It’s also about emotional boundaries. And those boundaries **must be respected.**

“One day, he touched me without my consent.”

I live in a neighborhood near a peacekeepers’ base. When MONUSCO arrived, we were told they were here to protect us. So, when a soldier approached me and said he could help me get a job at the base, I believed him, I felt safe. I was trying to find a way to support my two children. At first, he was kind. He brought me food, listened to me, and said he would talk to someone to help me get work as a cleaner. He asked me to meet him several times, often in isolated places. Then he started asking for things in return. He told me I needed to “trust him” if I wanted his help to continue. I didn’t know who to talk to. I felt ashamed.

I thought no one would believe me. So I kept quiet. But he kept insisting. One day, he touched me without my consent. I ran away. A woman at the community health center noticed something was wrong. She listened to and she explained that what he did was wrong and not allowed. She told me about the MONUSCO CDT hotline to report abuse. She even helped me take the first steps. And I was **taken seriously.** I don’t know what happened to him, but I took back control of my life. And now, I just want to say to other women who’ve been through this: it’s not your fault. **You have the right to say NO. You have the right to be heard. Breaking the silence is also the first step toward healing.**

These anonymous testimonies remind us why it is essential not only to listen, but also to support those who speak up, and to act decisively to foster a safer, more respectful environment for all.

PARLER POUR PROTÉGER

A 15-minute radio program produced by Conduct Conduct and Discipline Team
in collaboration with Radio Okapi

Every 2nd and 4th Friday of the month at 7:45 a.m. (Kinshasa Time)
Rebroadcast every Sunday at 9:00 p.m. (Kinshasa time)

Together, let us strengthen the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse!

Listening is already a commitment.



[Click here to watch the video](#)





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