

USING WORLD REFUGEE DAY TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE “WE STAND TOGETHER AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE”

By Bruce Mulenga

Many refugees are exposed to economic hardship, food insecurity, limited access to basic social services, and poor living conditions making which may put them at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. The most affected are women and children, but also persons with specific needs and additional vulnerabilities, and they require protection to ensure that their dignity is upheld at all times while they rebuild their lives. UNHCR works to ensure that its zero tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse becomes a reality.

In Zambia, the UN agency has initiated a nation-wide campaign against sexual exploitation and abuse to make people aware of the risks and the response mechanisms in place in the three refugee settlements of Meheba, Mayukwayukwa and Mantapala. A number of awareness raising activities are taking place to encourage everyone working in the refugee settlements to adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards of conduct towards refugees. Refugees are also sensitized to identify risk factors and to report any suspected case through a community based complaints mechanism. Posters and billboards have been set up in Mantapala to show that all partners working in the settlement – the UN, NGOs and the Government – are working together to combat these practices and to inform refugees on the reporting mechanisms and the assistance available for survivors. Focal point persons from partner organizations have been trained to facilitate assistance to survivors and to ensure that trust and confidence with communities are built.

For World Refugee Day, community members, staff from local government, UN agencies and partner organizations and traditional leaders have joined the messaging saying “*No to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse*” and are demonstrating their *No Excuse* and *Zero Tolerance* policy by taking a step to honoring the highest standards of ethical conduct. The Senior Field Coordinator for UNHCR in Zambia, Ms Liv Feijen, says that “We wanted to use World Refugee Day this year also to spread the important message that we have a joint responsibility to ensure protection for refugees and that we all need to work together as a team to accomplish it.” It is expected that the PSEA campaign will reinforce efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and make the settlements, in Zambia, a better place for refugees to live in. Mid-year, UNHCR will assume the global championship for PSEA from UNICEF.