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Statement of
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Item 13. Reports of the Ethics Offices of
UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS

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Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates,

I am very pleased to introduce the 2014 annual report of the UNFPA Ethics Office (DP/FPA/2015/8). This is the seventh annual report prepared by the UNFPA Ethics Office since its establishment in 2008. It is also the fifth annual report presented by the UNFPA Ethics Office to the Executive Board pursuant to decision 2010/17.

2014 Highlights

I am excited to have this opportunity to share with you some highlights of the Ethics Office’s operations in 2014. As you know, our mandate includes the following activities:

- Providing advice and guidance to staff on ethics-related issues.
- Administering the financial disclosure programme.
- Administering the protection against retaliation policy.
- Ethics training and education.
- Providing guidance to management on ethics standard setting.

As a two-person office with one professional staff member, it is impossible to deliver on our mandate without substantial collaboration with other departments and UN organizations. Thus, we continued in 2014 to engage with the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN), the Office of the Executive Director, most divisions within UNFPA, the Ombudsman for the Funds and Programmes, and the Staff Council leadership. We are especially grateful to the Legal Unit, whose Chief agreed to serve as the Ethics Office Officer-in-Charge following the retirement of our previous Ethics Adviser in April 2014.

I joined UNFPA in September 2014 from the UN Secretariat Ethics Office. My impression after eight months on the job is that UNFPA is an organization whose people are committed to the mission and mandate of the organization, from top to bottom, field to headquarters. The commitment and expertise of the leadership gives credibility to the organization and inspires staff to commit to our values. I am proud to be here.

With that, I offer a brief summary of our work during 2014.

i) In our first several years, we have seen steady increases in our “caseload”, that is, the requests for services that come to our office from staff and management. However, in 2014 we saw a significant drop in these requests. Most significantly, advisory requests went from 161 in 2013 to 104 in 2014; standard setting matters went from 19 in 2013 to 9 in 2014. This decrease is almost totally attributable to the period during which the UNFPA Ethics Office did not have a full-time Ethics Adviser. However, I am pleased to say that for the first five months of 2015, we have experienced a caseload similar to 2013 levels. This quick decrease followed by a return to previous levels is an indicator of the importance to staff of an independent Ethics Office.

ii) In the context of ethics standard setting, the Ethics Office reviewed and commented on several policies, procedures and practices, including the policies on oversight,
personal technology use, grants, and hospitality. Such reviews are important to ensure organizational ethics issues are raised and addressed, in addition to personal conflicts issues.

iii) During the 2014 financial disclosure filing cycle, 674 staff members submitted financial disclosure statements in respect of the 2013 calendar year. This is a record, and reflects an overall 130 percent increase since the program began. Staff members should be commended for willingly complying with this program’s requirements.

iv) With regard to protection against retaliation, in 2014 we received three complaints of retaliation and two inquiries about application of the retaliation policy. One of these cases was referred for investigation, but ultimately it was determined that no retaliation had occurred. The other two cases were closed without referral. In all three cases, the original protected activity was a workplace grievance (as opposed to a complaint of fraud or corruption).

**Outlook for 2015**

I would now like to share with you some of our plans over the next annual cycle. The Ethics Office hopes to increase our core advisory work, including advising management regarding organizational conflicts of interest and advising and assisting staff in managing personal conflicts of interest. The expertise of our staff, and the sheer volume of our interactions with vendors and implementing partners, suggests that we should have more than 5 percent of staff and personnel making requests and raising issues to the Ethics Office.

Our mandate to provide confidential advice does not explicitly require us to engage with staff members regarding workplace respect-related complaints, including harassment, discrimination, abuse of authority, and benefit entitlement concerns. Yet, individuals continue to approach the Ethics Office with such complaints, sometimes in the form of requests for advice about how to handle a situation. Usually, those individuals know the proper mechanisms for such reports, but are still hesitant to use them. The Ethics Office will work with staff and managers to desensitize the idea of raising concerns through management and other appropriate channels. We plan to take a balanced approach in advising staff and management on so-called workplace respect issues. Our revised *Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service* is a valuable resource which reminds all staff of how we are supposed to treat each other, even and especially in tense and difficult situations.

Regarding retaliation specifically, UNFPA policies and leaders clearly encourage staff to speak up, to report misconduct, and to be confident that they will be protected from retaliation. However, our Global Staff Survey results continue to confirm what we know anecdotally – too many staff still feel that speaking up will be either a futile effort, or worse, will be detrimental to them personally. The Ethics Office will focus on helping management create environments where speaking up can be done safely, respectfully, and with positive results; and on helping staff learn to use these environments with confidence that the organization will support and protect them.
With respect to our mandate on training, education and outreach, we are pleased to say that we have launched the new Ethics Office microsite, which contains helpful information and articles on ethics issues. Further, we are developing a new online ethics training program, which will focus on the obligations we share as international civil servants, educate staff about avoiding and addressing conflicts of interest, encourage staff to report misconduct and expect protection from retaliation, and share information about the Ethics Office and other oversight bodies.

We also hope to continue the Ethics Office’s practice of engaging directly with staff in the field via mission visits. Virtual interactions are helpful, and certainly cost-efficient, but there is no substitute for in-person training and consultation to build relationships among colleagues, and to help this new Ethics Adviser better understand the organization and the people who make it work. Our limited travel budget means that I can only take up one, perhaps two, missions per year. Alternatively, we must request field offices, whose budgets are also constrained, to cover the costs of my travel. And yet, our data shows that staff members are far more likely to seek advice and share information when we are there in person rather than in spirit.

With that, I conclude my remarks and thank you, Mr. President and Distinguished Delegates, for your time and attention.