



**Opening Remarks by H.E. Ms. Aviva Raz Shechter,
Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN in Geneva**

Sexual Harassment and Violence: A Call to Action

Graduate Institute, 7 December 2017, 14:00

Distinguished panelists, dear friends,

On behalf of myself and my Canadian colleague, Rosemary McCarney, I would like to extend my gratitude to the Gender Center at the Graduate Institute for organizing this important and timely event with us.

Sexual harassment is all around us. It follows us wherever we go and makes us feel unsafe in the places we should feel most secure. We see it everywhere and most often we see it at our workplace where we spend most of our day. The prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace is alarming. Every day, in every country in the world, women and men are subjected to it. Many of them stay silent. While men are also harassed, women are most frequently the victims of sexual harassment.

In the past several months, many cases of sexual harassment in the workplace have come to light. There is a good chance you have seen someone you know post the hashtag “#MeToo” on social media. This has been used, in response to the growing number of women coming forward, as one way to share personal experiences with sexual assault and/or harassment, and to give people a sense of the magnitude of this problem. The general public’s reaction, which has mainly condemned aggressors and supported victims, suggests that times are changing and society is ready for a meaningful reflection on this topic.

Violence and harassment in the world of work affects women regardless of age, location, income or social status. It can restrict women's economic and social potential, including their rights to education, freedom of movement and work. It has a significant impact on their physical and mental health, which can affect job performance, absenteeism, missed promotions and job losses. Provisions covering sexual harassment in employment are in place in at least 114 countries, including Israel and Canada, yet, the gaps between existing laws and provisions and their enforcement are clear.

During the last session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Israel led to the adoption of a new resolution on "Preventing and Eliminating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace". The resolution condemns sexual harassment in all its forms, especially against women and girls, including in the workplace, and emphasizes the need to take all necessary measures to prevent and eliminate it. The message sent to all stakeholders is clear: we need, and we can, prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace.

Abuse of power is easy when exerted against those fearful of being dismissed or sidelined. Most of the harassment was well known but left unchallenged. So many women suffered and lost their jobs as a result. It was never acceptable, unfortunately it takes hundreds of brave women to talk about their personal experience of sexual harassment before harassment is taken seriously.

This event is a part of the "16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence Campaign", a campaign which could not be more appropriate to put the light and focus on the discussion on sexual harassment in the workplace. I believe that what we will hear shortly from our panelists, who represent several different sectors in society, will give us all lots of food for thoughts and action in order to pave our way forward with addressing this multilayered and very disturbing phenomenon.

I deeply hope that the current wave of awareness for sexual harassment will lead all relevant stakeholders to an effective "zero tolerance" attitude and action in all levels.

I wish us all a successful and fruitful discussion.

Thank you.