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Sent: Friday, December 15, 2017 12:01 PM
To: 'ombudsman@worldbank.org' <ombudsman@worldbank.org>; 'wbgombuds@gmail.com' <wbgombuds@gmail.com>
Subject: Sexual Assaults in the World Bank

Dear World Bank Ombudsperson Office

When I was a young World Bank staff member in the early 1980s I was sexually assaulted by two male World Bank officials.

INTRODUCTION

As you know 2017 has become the year of reckoning on sexual assaults. Women who did not feel safe coming forward in the past are speaking up about sexual assaults by supervisors and colleagues not only in the US but the world at large.

Constant media reports about sexual assault cases evoke the pain I have felt since two World Bankers assaulted me in the early 1980s.

I hope you will respond more supportively than did the World Bank Ombudsman in the early 1980s. He reinforced my feeling of isolation as described below.

Living today in a time of reckoning and accountability on new and old sexual assaults motivates me to reach out to you.

MY WORLD BANK SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES

In the early 1980s I was sexually assaulted by two male World Bankers on two separate missions to China that I call Cases I and II:

Case I: In the first case my then indirect Bank boss (I directly reported to a Division Chief who reported to a Department Director) came up to me from behind while I was checking in at a hotel reception. He pressed his full body weight against mine and began breathing heavily, pushing his genitals against me and kissing me all over the place. I shoved him away and tried to avoid him thereafter. Avoiding him was impossible since I saw him daily in our Bank offices. Our stressed relationship insidiously undermined my work situation. I felt the Bank's office environment was not a safe workplace.

Case II: Even more egregious was my second sexual assault experience. Upon arriving on another mission to China, a male colleague from another Bank department, suggested he visit my hotel room to allow us to prepare for our initial meeting scheduled for the next morning with Chinese counterparts. Upon agreeing it never occurred to me that once he entered my room he would physically grab and push me onto the bed. My adrenalin came to the fore giving me the strength to shove him out of my room. This experience strained our relations for the mission and thereafter.

SEEKING REDRESS

Although I was petrified to discuss sexual assaults with supervisors and colleagues in fear of retribution such as job loss the two assaults gave me the courage to visit and seek redress from the World Bank Ombudsman. He told me he could do nothing without witnesses in each case. That ended my complaint process.

Without any transparency and accountability, the perpetrators, and other lechers in the Bank who were protected by silence, might have continued to commit other sexual assaults.

At the time I could not do more. I felt pushing away my sexual assaulters, especially my superior, already harmed our relations and my career. I believed the Ombudsman should have interviewed and punished my sexual assaulters, the perpetrators, rather than me, the victim, who suffered pain and damage.

I hope that today the Bank has and enforces policies to prevent and punish sexual abuse.

But I cannot assume the Bank has a sexual harassment-free environment today given widespread sexual assault experiences coming to light in other institutions and the Bank's somewhat patriarchal culture.

Might the Bank now have sexual assault grievance reporting and redress processes? To what extent do sexual assaults in the Bank get reported and to what extent are they redressed? Does the Bank have a system that encourages victim reporting? Does the Bank settle old sexual assault claims retroactively as increasing numbers of institutions are doing today?

SPEAKING UP NOW

I am speaking up now for these reasons:

First to retroactively seek and explore obtaining justice.

Second to share my experiences with you and current Bank staff, especially young women, who may still lack power in the face of senior managers and staff. Perhaps the Bank could use my examples to improve the Bank's work culture today (or maybe you have so many newer examples you do not need mine).

In those days I should have enjoyed a workplace free from sexual assaults as should Bank staff today.

Now is the ideal moment to examine, spotlight and redress past and present sexual violations in the Bank so that all staff have the safe workplace they deserve!

I look forward to hearing back.

Sincerely,

Elaine Zuckerman
Former World Bank Staff
President, Gender Action