

**Introductory Remarks of Henrik M. Nordentoft
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**Global Strategic Priorities (EC/68/SC/CRP.18)
68th Meeting of the Standing Committee
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Thank you, Madam Chair

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to provide you with an overview of the progress achieved in 2016 against the Global Strategic Priorities – or GSPs for short - set for the 2016-2017 biennium. I will also make a brief introduction to the GSPs set for the 2018-2019 biennium.

The conference room paper before you, EC / 68 / SC / CRP.18 provides you with a very succinct overview of the results achieved by UNHCR field offices on the operational GSPs - in Annex 1 as well as the results of the work done by Headquarters and Regional Offices in pursuit of the support and management GSPs in Annex 2.

The brief narrative description in the Conference room paper and the two annexes is complemented by the 2016 Progress Report on the Global Strategic Priorities which contains more detailed information as well as operational highlights from the field to illustrate the work carried out by UNHCR operations to seek advances on the GSPs as well as the challenges encountered. This report was published on the Global Focus website and a hardcopy has also been made available to all delegations this morning.

Before delving into the progress achieved against specific GSPs, it is worth recalling that progress against GSPs is not a linear evolution where the level of progress achieved in the previous year can be taken for granted and secured for the following year. On the contrary, most of the GSP areas, require constant attention and investment to even maintain previous year's levels. Moreover, in many situations, especially in operations which witness an increase in the number of refugees or internally displaced persons – which certainly was the case in 2016 with over 10 million newly displaced - or where a shift in policies or a resurgence of unrest and insecurity in areas hosting displaced populations has taken place - additional investments, adjusted implementation modalities and renewed advocacy efforts may be required – and even in these situations it can not guarantee that the level achieved last year can be maintained.

This is the reason why we have opted for a reporting format on GSPs that shows where we have been able to progress further from previous year's level, where all efforts have resulted in “maintaining” last year's level and where we have faced a regression compared to the level attained in the previous year. In the progress report, we have also included what we call a “criticality view” – a pie chart for every operational GSP area that sets out where the operations are at with regard to operational thresholds – and provide the comparison with the situation at the end of 2015.

Madam Chair,

Let me now turn to review some of the outcomes of the work undertaken by field operations in 2016 in pursuit of the operational GSPs.

In the area of health, we were pleased to note that in spite of rising numbers and new refugee emergencies, including in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania, UNHCR colleagues working together with health partners have been able to contain mortality levels among children under 5 years of age – one of the most vulnerable and at-risk groups – to levels well within acceptable standards for humanitarian situations. This has been a result of real-time surveillance of health indicators and monitoring of programmes that has allowed for early and timely interventions to reduce morbidity and mortality.

While mortality rates improved and standards were met across almost all operations, nutrition surveys undertaken in 108 sites show a more mixed picture regarding the levels of global acute malnutrition with levels in over a quarter of the sites – particularly in Chad, Ethiopia, Niger and Sudan - above the emergency threshold of 15 %. The factors giving rise to malnutrition are multi-faceted requiring a comprehensive and integrated response across a broad range of sectors: livelihood, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, stable and sufficient food pipeline with provision for supplementary feeding etc. Many operations have faced disruptions and reductions in the food pipeline due to declines in funding for food assistance which have negatively impacted the overall nutrition situation. While the situation of malnourished children is given special attention by UNHCR and its partners across all operations, the dynamic nature of humanitarian situations is often such that for every child successfully treated, the nutritional status of new arrivals may be critical or previously treated children relapse.

Refugees' health also depends on the availability of safe and portable water and it is therefore satisfying to report that almost all operations were able to deliver a daily minimum of 15 litres of water per person with over half delivering over 20 litres. UNHCR and its WASH partners are acting together at several levels – exploring opportunities to increase the yield of national water installations and extend connections to sites and settlements, identifying water sources and drilling boreholes in arid and isolated areas and putting in place environmentally suitable water supply solutions with solar powered water pumping systems.

Within the area of protection, UNHCR continued to put strong emphasis on activities intended to enhance the timely response and support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence as well as seeking the involvement of the communities in prevention and protection efforts. Under the Safe from the Start, an initiative of the US Department of State, 13 additional countries have implemented multi-sectoral and community based projects to prevent and respond to SGBV. Specialized protection staff have also been deployed to emergency situations to ensure that appropriate assessment and strategies were implemented early.

UNHCR also continued to work with Governments advocating for accession to international or regional instruments on refugees, IDPs and stateless and for adoption of national legislation and policies consistent with international standards. An area where we witnessed more mixed progress, as advances in some countries were offset by legislative initiatives in others seeking to limit access to asylum and protection for persons in need of international protection.

Specifically with regard to the protection situation of children, UNHCR, working in close partnership with government partners and civil society, continues to see very encouraging progress in its efforts to ensure that displaced children have access to national child protection services, maintaining the almost 90 % level achieved in 2015 across an increased number of operations reporting in 2016.

UNHCR and its partners also continue to invest considerable efforts in protecting unaccompanied and separated children including through undertaking procedures for assessing children's best interests with many operations reporting continued progress. Several operations have reported strengthened involvement of community-based child protection structures in supporting best interests procedures and child protection case management, including working with refugee outreach volunteers and para-social workers. UNHCR deployed child protection specialists to over 20 operations to assist in designing more effective interventions and training staff and partners in the management of best interests determination procedures.

Madam Chair,

Within the area of statelessness and birth registration, UNHCR and UNICEF have joined forces and launched the Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality which aims to work with governments, non-governmental organisations and civil society to addressing childhood statelessness. Birth registration is an important means in the prevention of statelessness, and particularly so for displaced children. While we continue to see improvements in many countries in the area of birth registration, the dynamics and scale of humanitarian situations is such, that the capacity of local structures often is unable to cope with the increase in numbers – compounded with regulations and procedural requirements which may not be suited to cater for the special situation of displaced persons. To address the issues of lack of birth registration and identity documentation, UNHCR partnered with key stakeholders, including the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF to produce new principles on identification, which promote the inclusion of all individuals in national identification systems, consistent with target 9 of *SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*.

About half of the world's refugees are children and ensuring that they have early access to start or resume their education is a priority objective. In line with UNHCR's *Education Strategy* and the *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*, and in support of *SDG 4 on Quality Education*, UNHCR is working with governments to find ways to integrate refugee children in national education systems. Supported by the Educate a Child multi-year programme, encouraging progress has been seen in several countries, including Turkey and Jordan, where the expansion of facilities and schools working in double shifts have allowed very substantial numbers of children to receive education. Special efforts undertaken to promote the inclusion of out-of school children in 12 countries resulted in almost a quarter million children who regained access to education. While the progress achieved for primary education is encouraging, opportunities for continuing education at secondary or even tertiary levels are much more limited in many situations – which remains a serious concern - in spite of several initiatives and programs, including the DAFI program, funded by Germany, which for the past 25 years have provided scholarships for tertiary education for talented refugee students and today supports some 4500 students in just under 40 countries.

Finally, in the area of solutions, there was some improvement noticed in a number of operations with several Governments taking steps to facilitate a better integration of refugees by allowing access to national services and labour markets and thereby enhancing their opportunities to reach a level of self-sufficiency and contribute to the local economy. While the number of refugees returning to their countries more than doubled in 2016, there was no significant breakthrough, and the majority of returns took place to countries with fragile context such as Afghanistan and Somalia, where it remains challenging to provide timely and adequate reintegration support. Against this backdrop, it was encouraging to see a robust increase in the number of resettlement places provided with over 125.000 refugees departing in 2016 – an increase of 50 % compared with 2015 – and also a significant increase in the number of new resettlement submissions reaching just over 160.000 refugees. That being said, the need to find lasting solutions to the plight of refugees and IDPs, especially for those in protracted situations, remains as acute as ever before and remains a major focus of the work of the Office.

Madam Chair,

Let me now turn briefly to the support and management GSPs, which focus on some of the priority functions provided by headquarters and regional offices.

Faced with continued large scale forced displacement, with three million new refugees in 2016, the majority of whom fleeing situations in South Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Burundi and Yemen, and growing needs, UNHCR intensified its resource mobilization efforts – and UNHCR's donors responded generously in 2016, providing just under 4 billion US Dollars – for UNHCR's work to protect people of concern and mitigate the effects of conflict and displacement. The level of funds raised from the private sector grew to 350 Million USD, which represents a 25 % increase over previous year.

UNHCR's Emergency Division supported field operations responding to new emergencies by deployment of a total of 370 trained emergency personnel drawing on internal stand-by capacity and existing stand-by arrangements with its partners. Emergency relief items were also dispatched by air and land from UNHCR's strategically located regional warehouses.

The importance of demonstrating rigorous financial accountability in the management of operations remained a preeminent area of focus in 2016. New guidance and tools and provision of timely financial information for decision making was made available and the upgrade of UNHCR's enterprise resource management system was finalized and rolled out to operations. With the growing emphasis on cash-based interventions as a modality of assistance and protection, UNHCR launched its *Policy on Cash-based interventions* and a *Strategy for the Institutionalization of Cash-based interventions* and organized a wide-reaching training program reaching 700 UNHCR and partner staff. New financial procedures and controls were also put in place to ensure accountability and consistency across operations.

UNHCR continued to perform its role as global cluster lead in IDP situations for protection, shelter and camp coordination and management supporting the network of 66 operational clusters in field operations. In association with its partners, Global Clusters undertook strategic planning, arranged for deployments of sector experts, information managers and cluster coordinators and organized the development of tools, guidance and training opportunities. They also participated in broader cluster-wide discussions under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, with support from OCHA, on ways to further strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian actions to respond to situations of internal displacement.

Madam Chair,

I will now turn briefly to introduce the set of GSPs for the 2018-2019 biennium which is set out in Annex 3 of the Conference Room paper.

At the beginning of this year, the High Commissioner issued UNHCR's Strategic Directions for 2017 to 2021. They have guided the planning of UNHCR operations for 2018 and 2019 that was undertaken a few months back. With its emphasis on five core directions; ensuring protection, responding in emergencies, promoting inclusion and self-reliance, including through the engagement of development actors; empowering the people UNHCR serves; and pursuing solutions – it was felt that the management and reporting framework established for the Global Strategic Priorities remained pertinent and relevant as illustration of the progress achieved across these priority areas.

We have therefore decided to maintain the use of GSPs for the coming biennium. While we did consider to propose certain changes and adjustments to the operational GSPs to further enhance the alignment with the Strategic Directions, we felt that it would be best to await the completion of the revision we are currently undertaking to our Results-based management system. The ongoing revision will involve a change in the current results framework which covers different plan levels and associated performance and impact indicators that we are using for our field operations to plan, monitor and report against the GSPs. Introducing a set of new stand-alone indicators that is not presently captured by our planning and monitoring system would in our view lead to complications and inefficiencies that is not desirable. We are however confident that the revision – once completed and implemented - will assist us in shaping a strengthened approach to reporting against our strategic priorities.

That being said, in order to reflect some of the broader institutional priorities set out in the Strategic Directions, and also to reflect UNHCR's commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the World Humanitarian Summit and the joint "Grand Bargain" initiative, we have reviewed and adjusted the set of Support and Management GSPs for 2018-2019. For your ease of review, I just want here to point out the main changes as compared with the current set. I refer you to page 21 of the conference room paper. The main changes are in – GSP 3 with focus on the development of new protection and solutions frameworks, GSP 4 which highlights the importance of data and information for evidence-based decision making, GSP 5 with added emphasis on UNHCR's role in promoting the "centrality of protection" in humanitarian actions, GSP 6 which reflects our gradual shift to multi-year and multi-partner planning supported by joint needs assessments, and finally in GSP 7 which reflects the growing importance of cash-based interventions as a modality to meet the assistance and protection needs of persons of concern.

And with this we have come to the conclusion of my statement. I look forward to hearing any comments or questions that you may have regarding the Global Strategic Priorities of the Office.

Thank you, Madam Chair.