

Item 5 (a)

Talking points on EC/71/SC/CRP.3 UNHCR's programme in the United Nations: proposed programme budget for 2021

Thank you Chair,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to present EC/71/SC/CRP.3 UNHCR's programme in the United Nations: proposed programme budget for 2021. This item has been reintroduced on the Standing Committee workplan this year as an annual item, as noted in the background note to the report.

I would like to start with a brief note on the background on the UN regular budget and UN budgetary reform

As you may be aware, a small portion of the overall UN General Assembly (UNGA) appropriation to the UN's Regular Budget or the UNRB, is intended to fund a proportion of UNHCR's management and administration costs. Before you, document EC/71/SC/CRP.3 provides the proposed programme framework for this proportion of the UNRB to UNHCR's M&A costs in 2021. This conference room paper draws from the 2021 "Fascicle" for the UNRB contribution to UNHCR, which is still being finalised by UN colleagues in New York. This Fascicle will be reviewed by CPC and the ACABQ who will advise the 5th committee of the UNGA who, in turn, will reflect its decision in its resolution by end December.

As you know, the Secretary General's reform proposals for programme planning and budgeting processes have included a shift in the budget cycle from two years to an annual budget¹. The UNRB's annual budget format is in a trial period up to 2022, when the UNGA will take a final decision on the matter. **For 2021**, both the CRP and the fascicle therefore reflect this annual planning cycle and include additional or modified information as requested by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). In particular, Member States requested the UN Secretariat to strengthen the format with regard to showing a comprehensive and overall account of past results. The document provides a fuller picture of UNHCR's programmes beyond the management and administration costs funded by the UN Regular Budget, also per the request of these bodies.

Distinguished Delegates,

The conference room paper before you highlights UNHCR's programme of work, its results areas, and its overall strategic direction for 2021. I would like to mention only a few major points

¹ A/72/492/Add.1 of 26 September 2017 "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: improving and streamlining the programme planning and budgeting process".

covered in the paper. As you know, UNHCR works in a highly dynamic and constantly changing environment, with the number of people of concern in 2019 reaching an estimated 79.4 million. This represents an increase compared to 2018, when the total population of concern was 74.8 million. Work with national and international NGOs remains critical to UNHCR's humanitarian efforts. According to provisional expenditure figures, in 2019, UNHCR disbursed approximately \$1.25 billion to 900 national and international NGOs, reaching its "grand bargain" commitment of providing 25 per cent of its programme expenditures through local and national responders. In 2019, some \$664 million was provided to 915 local and national responders, including \$498 million to 709 NGO partners, the highest number of local and national partners recorded by UNHCR.

UNHCR used its early warning, risk monitoring analysis and preparedness system to review and oversee the levels of preparedness and capacity of country operations to respond to the emergencies. UNHCR and its partners responded to the needs of over 16.6 million displaced people affected by multiple simultaneous emergencies worldwide. Core relief items worth over \$27 million were dispatched by UNHCR from global stockpiles, which ensured the Office had the capacity to respond to the needs of up to 600,000 displaced people around the world within 72 hours. Some 8.8 million persons of concern were also registered by the Office in 69 operations worldwide using biometric technology.

UNHCR expanded its cash assistance programme to provide protection, assistance and services to persons of concern, delivering some \$620 million in cash assistance – mainly in the form of multi-purpose cash grants – to some 4 million of the most vulnerable persons of concern. Cash assistance has nearly doubled from the 2015 \$358 million, and exceeds in-kind assistance and services.

Much has been presented on a number of situations during the regional updates. We would add to those situations by also noting UNCHR's responses in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe to serve those affected by cyclone Idai, the IDP situations in Burkina Faso and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the refugee responses in Costa Rica, Iraq and Niger.

Furthermore, the first Global Refugee Forum, which was held in December 2019, offered a unique opportunity to mobilize increased support for refugees and the countries and communities that host them, demonstrating solidarity and more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in practice.

UNHCR's internal change process encompassed multiple areas of work including, results-based management (RBM), human resources, data and digitalization, business processes and systems and risk management. While many elements of the transformation were put in place in 2019, UNHCR will continue to work towards strengthening its ability to deliver protection and solutions for persons of concern in the most relevant and effective way. UNHCR will ensure consistent support to country operations, including the ability to adapt their programmes in light

of new challenges and opportunities, translate global priorities into regional and country-specific strategies, and foster greater programmatic integrity and value for money in the field.

Distinguished Delegates, I would like to take this opportunity to make a couple of specific comments on this agenda item.

Firstly

Article 20 of the UNHCR statute states that the Office of the High Commissioner shall be financed under the budget of the United Nations. These resources can only be used for expenditure related to management and administration costs (MA). In other words, other expenditures relating to the activities of the High Commissioner shall be financed by voluntary contributions. Specifically, the regular budget appropriation of UNHCR finances:

- Two regular posts at the USG and ASG level;
- A lump-sum grant which is used for funding of 218 MA posts at Headquarters and a small proportion non-post requirements, typically, fixed costs incurred at UNHCR Headquarters such as rental, utilities, jointly financed activities etc.

Through its resolution 59/276 of 23 December 2004, the General Assembly had set 50.8% as a minimum percentage of UNHCR's MA expenditure that would be covered by UN regular budget contributions. We take note that this percentage as well as actual funding levels has dropped in recent years due to a reduction in UN funding. UNHCR expenditure charged to the UN regular budget was \$47 million in 2012 while the starting position for the 2021 has been estimated at \$40 million. We are acutely aware of the UN's financial crisis, and take note that this level of funding would represent 23% of UNHCR's MA projected requirements for 2021. What this means is that in 2021 the UN regular budget would cover the 2 regular budget posts of HC and DHC, but that UNHCR – from its voluntary contributions -would most likely have to contribute part of its own funds to the 218 MA posts and finance entirely non-post requirements.

Secondly

The programmatic aspects of the 2021 UNRB proposal are the same that you, our member states, approved at the seventieth regular session of the Executive Committee in October 2019 upon reviewing UNHCR's Biennial Programme budget for 2020-2021. There is an overlap between the UN regular budget and the UNHCR biennial budget submission exercises. We note that there are opportunities for streamlining the UNRB content, with cross references to our biennial budget, and a specific focus on the MA activities that the UN appropriation is intended to fund, rather than on the overall programmatic activities of UNHCR.

We thank you for your support, and look forward to our continued collaboration to ensure that UNHCR is able to meet the needs of persons of concern effectively and efficiently.

Thank you for your attention.