

Agenda Item 2.(ii)

Staff Safety and Security

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Chairperson, Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the pleasure to be with you today as it is the first time that I am addressing you on the important matter of staff safety and security.

A Complex Security Environment

The current security environment remains extremely complex, requiring UNHCR personnel to work close to, and sometimes in actual zones of conflict, often in close proximity to armed groups who sometimes consider the UN and humanitarian workers to be legitimate targets.

UNHCR's Security Strategy: Strengthening a Culture of Security

Now more than ever, UNHCR is operating in situations that pose the greatest risk to personnel, that refugees and other people of concern need us the most. The goal of UNHCR, is therefore, to strengthen an culture of security based on sound risk management practices so that UNHCR is able to stay and deliver critical programs for people in need, even when risk remains.

Chairperson, Delegates, I wish to present you where UNHCR stands with its staff safety and security and where we intend to go. We do this in accordance with our action plan, Culture of Security 2017-2019, which outlines five broad categories of activities, or "Pillars" namely: **Advice and Support; the Security Workforce, Governance and Oversight; Liaison and Partnership; and Training.**

- (i) **Advice and Support.** While ultimate responsibility of safety for UNHCR personnel rests with the host government, managers are accountable for assuring adequate security measures are in place. The main purpose of UNHCR Field Security Service (FSS) is to provide managers with sound and well-reasoned technical advice and support. In 2016, FSS fielded missions to over 30 high-risk countries to support assessments, planning or selection of mitigating measures. This include

technical support that is of growing importance in security engineering and blast expertise to ensure that structural measures are appropriate for the threats. In the blasts that occurred near the UNHCR premises in Kabul in January 2016, and again in May 2017, a UNHCR Security Engineer identified structural improvements that were critical in reducing damage and possible loss of life. As UNHCR is increasing its operational presence in Libya to respond to the needs there, so too the organization is confronted to put up additional security measures.

- (ii) **The Security Workforce.** Providing sound advice and support requires a security workforce attuned to UNHCR's unique needs. UNHCR now has 75 international security positions and nearly 200 locally-recruited security staff. Most of these positions support personnel in particularly challenging operating environments. The Field Security Service at Headquarters manages this workforce and provides surge capacity when needed. Recent years have seen a widening of recruitment efforts to include people of more diverse professional backgrounds, a range of language skills, and greater gender diversity (more female security professionals).
- (iii) **Governance and Oversight.** Appropriate oversight is a critical aspect of security management. UNHCR undertakes a number of activities in this regard, including meeting regularly at the senior management level to review risk management measures in countries with significant risks. An important oversight process is the annual review of compliance with Minimum Operational Security Standards or MOSS; according to the most recent review, 415 of UNHCR's 421 offices, or almost 99 per cent, are MOSS compliant; representing one of the highest compliance rates in the United Nations. The remaining 6 offices, including offices recently established to respond to emerging situations, are working to achieve full compliance without delay.
- (iv) **Liaison and Partnership.** For UNHCR a culture of security includes active participation in UN Security Management System, in particular with the UN Department of Safety and Security with whom we closely cooperate in security efforts. A recent example is the active contribution to the development of a UN-wide road-safety strategy, modeled off the lessons from our own internal road safety strategy developed in line with the 2030 Sustainable development goals and the "Global plan of action for road safety. In addition, UNHCR remains an active member of the Saving Lives Together Oversight Committee, reflecting its

commitment to including NGO partners in security training, briefings and other activities in the field.

- (v) **Security Training.** The knowledge, skills and attitudes of personnel are the best guarantee of operating safely in complex environments. UNHCR devotes considerable effort to security training, focusing specific attention on development for managers, professional security staff, and adapted training for specific situations or groups. UNHCR's Security Management Learning Programme and Security Management exercise equip managers and staff in the field with the tools and techniques of security risk management; since 2016 almost 220 managers and staff have undertaken this training, and two further courses will be run later this year. For FSAs, UNHCR in 2017 developed an on-line training course designed to enhance skills in analyzing security threats. Also in 2017, recognizing the different threats that women can face in the field, UNHCR in cooperation with WFP developed and delivered a training of trainers programme for female security staff and staff welfare officers, as part of a wider effort to address gender-based threats in security management.

Conclusion

Chairperson, now allow me to articulate the way forward. The efforts described here outline the range of activities UNHCR is undertaking to provide the highest level of safety and security for staff as they in turn strive to safeguard the wellbeing of refugees and other persons of concern. Strengthening a culture of security is an organization-wide effort, requiring close cooperation and engagement with member states, government and local communities upon whom we rely to ensure the safety of our personnel. In this connection, I wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank host governments and communities for their tireless support in creating favourable security environment for UNHCR and other humanitarian actors.

Thank you.