# Staff Safety and Security

**Ms. Shoko Shimozawa, Director, Division, Emergency Security and Supply (DESS)**

Chairperson, Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide you with a brief update on efforts the organization is taking with respect to the safety and security of our workforce.

## The Current Security Environment

UNHCR continues to operate in challenging security environments, with more than 20 per cent of the workforce conducting their tasks in areas deemed to be high risk due to armed conflict, the presence of extremist groups, and instability.

In 2019 UNHCR experienced 320 security and safety incidents. As of 31 July 2020, the number of incidents stands at 157. Partner organizations working alongside us experienced even more incidents. Regrettably, some of these incidents have resulted in fatalities and injuries.

Just last month in Niger, a UNHCR vehicle operated by an NGO partner was carjacked, and on 10 August an attack outside the capital Niamey resulted in the death of seven aid workers and their guides. In Mogadishu, Somalia, UNHCR and other UN and humanitarian personnel have been exposed to indirect fire from mortars on their compound on at least six occasions. In late December 2019, a UNHCR workforce member and two guards were kidnapped from their guest house and held for three days before being released.

Safety incidents continue to be a concern for the organization, particularly road traffic accidents. In 2019 car crashes claimed the lives of two UNHCR staff members. In March of last year, UNHCR sadly lost three staff members in the crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302.

Staying and delivering in these environments as well as in other areas with risks has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of COVID-19 has first and foremost been a public health emergency, but as the crisis has persisted it has had implications for security, aggravating tensions among groups and individuals in ways impacting both personnel and persons of concern. In countries where initial cases were reported as coming from abroad, instances of hostility toward foreigners were seen to increase. The spread of COVID-19 has had a profound effect on economies at the global and local scale; security

implications have included increased crime in some locations and inter-communal tension. For UNHCR a critical concern has been that, in high-risk areas where existing plans rely on availability of evacuation means (including MEDEVAC) and stabilization facilities as mitigating measures, many security plans have severe limitations given border closures and quarantine restrictions, while delays in availability for shipment or deployment of necessary security risk management equipment and personnel have also meant that personnel are more exposed to risk.

**UNHCR's Security Governance and Management Strategy**

In line with the organizational restructuring process, UNHCR's field security has reconfigured to better serve the needs of the operations and regional bureau in the field. Senior security personnel are now located within each regional bureau providing direct support to the Regional Bureau Directors, supporting operations which do not have dedicated security personnel, and ensuring linkages with the Field Security Service at Headquarters. This revised structure ensures an approach to security management that is adapted to the regional yet consistent with global standards and norms.

At headquarters, a leaner Field Security Service is focused primarily on operational oversight and monitoring, standard setting, global analysis, policy development including within United Nations interagency mechanisms, gender specific threat support, and physical security measures.

Some key deliverables of the Field Security Service include the revision and update of UNHCR's Security Management Policy, to be issued later this month or next, as well as guidelines and standard operating procedures on security processes which takes into account the revised accountability structures at all levels.

Regular Security Steering Committee meetings chaired by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations continue to ensure the appropriate oversight and review of operational posture balanced against the security risks for operations that are deemed high security risk. Seven such meetings have been conducted to date in 2020, with as many as eight more are prioritized for the remainder of the year.

The Field Security Service continues to work closely with Division of Human Resources to cultivate a diverse security workforce with appropriate language skills as well as the required technical expertise, in line with the organizations people strategy. At present the workforce

includes about 80 international and 220 locally recruited security personnel from a broad cross-section of nationalities mirroring UNHCR's global footprint. The organization is working to improve gender balance in the workforce; this year to date, three of five international recruitments have been women, with more identified for potential vacancies.

Training on gender aspects of security risk management, including awareness of gender-based threats and appropriate incident management, has been developed and delivered for security personnel. From 2019 until movement restrictions came into place this year, 882 persons participated in the training, and while the conventional training delivery has been largely on hold due to the pandemic, webinars have since been conducted on security topics for target audiences including on domestic violence given the global increase of incidents as well as issuing guidance on response and support.

As part of the organizational efforts to reduce road fatalities and injuries and in line with the UN Road Safety Strategy; UNHCR developed and launched on-line learning modules on safe road use for the workforce and managers, and driver training is underway in several countries to ensure drivers are trained to recognized international standards. To ensure appropriate oversight and implementation on road safety, data from technological platforms is regularly shared with regional bureaus for UNHCR and partner organizations.

**Conclusion**

The organization strives to achieve the highest level of security for our personnel, we continue to rely on cooperation and engagement with member states, government and local communities. While the world faces the challenges of COVID 19 it is imperative that the support afforded to us in the past continues so that appropriate security measures which protect us from and  where necessary respond to security incidents are in place so that UNHCR can continue to deliver our mandate. We look forward to this continued support.

Thank you.