

Remarks for the 77th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Room 2, CICG
10-12 March 2020

Mister Chairperson,
Excellencies,

Welcome to those of you tuning in remotely. These are challenging times indeed. Much has happened since we last met in September.

As an organization, we have had several milestone events, including the Global Refugee Forum in December, which involved more than 3,000 participants from governments, international organizations, humanitarian and development actors, the private sector, civil society, sports organizations, faith groups, academia, artists, and refugees. More than 1,000 pledges have been documented; more than 400 examples of good practices were shared; all demonstrating how the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is, can and will make a difference in the lives of refugees.

As of January, we are a decentralized organization. All seven Bureaus are more or less up and running, and becoming better equipped to support country offices in delivering protection and assistance. Key processes such as the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) have been revised, while Regional Asset Management Boards and Committees on Contracts have been established.

Such strength, agility and efficiency will be crucial in the year ahead, where we again, sadly, can project record numbers of displacement. In this regard, allow me to warmly introduce Raouf Mazou as our new Assistant High Commissioner for Operations. Raouf is highly regarded across UNHCR as an exemplary professional, who has brought energy, dedication and considerable expertise to the many roles in which he has served over the last 28 years, at UNHCR Headquarters and in the field.

We can anticipate considerable needs in protracted crisis such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan, which just had its 40th anniversary of the commencement of millions of displaced. We see worsening conditions in Libya, Venezuela and even Syria, which witnessed returns but also a severe deterioration in Idlib. And in new crises, especially in the Sahel, which the High Commissioner visited recently, the need are increasing amidst a complicated overlap of security, political, humanitarian, development and environmental challenges.

The attention of the world is also, currently, on an emergency of a very different nature, COVID-19. Given the evolving severity of the situation, allow me to brief you generally on how UNHCR is responding as efforts are already underway to mitigate its impact on the people we serve and the organization. The outbreak is a global challenge that must be addressed through international solidarity and cooperation, and we are only at the beginning of understanding the broader implications on how institutions and organizations of all kinds do business around the world in the difficult weeks and months ahead.

We have ramped up considerably our efforts to take established business continuity plans and begin applying them to ensure that as an organization with a mandate to deliver that we are able to continue with as little disruption as possible. To give you but one example, we have made this Standing Committee available virtually to you, Member States, as well as our personnel to minimize the need for travel even from our HQ down the street. Several large upcoming meetings are now being shifted entirely to videoconference. We will continue to operate, but conscious not to

continue business as usual and restrict travel to the most critical only and using common sense methods to limit risk.

We are more concerned currently about the impact on refugees, displaced persons, and others we serve. The situation is dynamic and more information on the virus and its behaviour is emerging, but what is already apparent is that COVID-19 does not discriminate. This already serves as an important reminder that in order to combat effectively any public health emergency, everyone – including refugees and the forcibly displaced – should be able to access health facilities and services in a non-discriminatory manner.

We will very soon be urgently appealing for an initial \$33 million to support prevention and response efforts in refugee situations and host countries in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. Over 80% of the world's refugee population and nearly all the world's internally displaced people are hosted in low to middle income countries, many of which have weaker health and water and sanitation systems. International solidarity is urgently needed to support countries hosting refugees and other forcibly displaced people to step up services for both them and local communities. Amongst his many priorities in this new role, Raouf will be leading the operational response to COVID-19, on which he will elaborate shortly.

In 2020 we will cement and further accelerate the broader transformation for UNHCR. Much of our focus, especially last year, was on decentralization, delegation of authorities, simplifying procedures, changing functions and moving the Bureaus out of headquarters to regional locations. We have also brought together the other pillars of transformation ongoing within the organization to ensure coherence amongst complementary objectives.

The aim of UNHCR's change process is to better position the organization to protect and aid populations of concern, promote solutions, address future challenges and take advantage of emerging opportunities. Each of these pillars of transformation are intended to enable UNHCR to respond fast and in a more flexible way, align its policies and procedures with key partners, adapt to UN-wide reforms aimed at simplifying processes and focusing on delivery, and ensuring consistent, predictable support to operations with which they can develop effective regional and country strategies, with an emphasis on integrity, accountability and efficiency.

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This year our priorities include implementing the policies and procedures designed to consolidate that decentralization and further empower country offices to benefit from restructuring and delegated authorities, advancing corporate initiatives such as the Results-Based Management (RBM) revision project and Next Generation Enterprise Resource Planning, and realigning Headquarters to best support country and regional offices. It is through this last process that we will adjust the functions and structures to ensure that Divisions and other HQ entities are optimally positioned to play their part in a new, rebalanced UNHCR.

The High Commissioner has already taken three decisions along these lines, namely, to create a new Division of Strategic Planning and Results, reconfigure the Division of Resilience and Solutions and establish a Global Data Service.

The Division of Strategic Planning and Results (or SPR) is led by Ritu Shroff; the division is charged with leading the organization's work on programme, budget, partner management and results management. Many of you already joined Ritu for a brief on the RBM project late last year.

We also welcome Sajjad Malik as the new Director of Resilience and Solutions (or DRS). This division will at its core be responsible for operationalizing the Global Compact on Refugees. This effort will be undertaken in collaboration with the Office of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, who will lead the associated normative and policy work, maintain an overview of the global implementation of the GCR, and ensure follow-up on the GRF. The reconfigured DRS integrates functions already in the Division, such as those related to education and livelihoods, while absorbing technical support functions that were previously in the Division of Programme Support and Management.

And finally, the Global Data Service, led by Axel Bisschop, is responsible for delivering the organization's new data strategy, which aims to ensure that by 2025, UNHCR is a trusted leader on data and information related to refugees and other affected populations, thereby enabling actions that protect, include and empower. These efforts will include working with the new regional Data and Information Management and Analysis (DIMA) teams that are being established in each Bureau.

This realignment is therefore not a uniform process, as some Divisions have already undergone significant reviews and restructuring, while others require more in-depth analysis. Division Directors have been tasked with identifying their strategic priorities, potential gaps and overlaps within headquarters and with the new Regional Bureaus, updating their division-specific roles, accountabilities and authorities, and detailing ongoing and planned projects and initiatives. The ultimate objective is to translate the corporate vision we have for the role played by headquarters into functions that can deliver and support the field appropriately.

This is also taking place in the early days of our annual planning process, which is being adapted to a decentralized structure. Part of the reason to start with headquarters is to keep this year's process light on the field, and for headquarters entities first to adjust and prioritize in the context of a regionalized organization working to further support and empower country operations. We will come back to you with specifics as the review unfolds throughout the year.

Several of the projects and initiatives of focus were covered in the Informal Consultative Meeting on Efficiencies last year, including, a) global fleet management, which generates around 18M in cost savings each year through standardization and centralization; b) PRIMES, which leverages biometrics to verify distribution, track assistance and reduce fraud; and c) the Digital Solutions Centre (DSC), which will develop and deploy solutions such as robotic process automation, artificial intelligence, chatbots and even blockchain technology to streamline how UN agencies organise their support services.

Hans Barrit, the Controller, can elaborate further when he joins us, but the Digital Solutions Centre was launched in October in partnership with WFP and the UN International Computing Centre (UNICC), and has been taking shape. The DSC's goal is to improve efficiency and provide higher quality services. This week we are having a virtual bootcamp at which participants from across the system will create the UN's first suite of digital solutions.

We will continue to work to uphold and meet our Grand Bargain commitments, both as an individual agency and as a co-convenor of the management cost workstream. As an agency, we are on track to meet our commitments on cash, localization and the use of biometrics, and continue to advocate with donor governments to reduce earmarking. Despite commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit, and with notable exceptions including Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, last year saw the highest share of earmarked funding on record for UNHCR, and flexible funding represented only 25% of overall income, down from 52% in 2012.

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On the topic of effectiveness and efficiency and our drive to deliver better to support UN reform, I would also like to mention the work of the Strategic Results Group on Business Innovations, better known as the BIG, which we have co-chaired with WFP since mid-2018. I recently joined a member state briefing in New York hosted by the Development Coordination Office (DCO) on the topic of system-wide efficiency, in which we outlined the progress of the BIG. Our two-year term with WFP will wrap up in June, and as we are already moving towards implementation of several streams of work, I wanted to take the opportunity to provide a very brief update.

For those familiar with the work of the BIG, its technical work is underpinned by three enablers: mutual recognition of policies and agreements, client satisfaction principles as a quality assurance mechanism, and costing and pricing principles to ensure transparency in service provision. Mutual recognition in particular has vast potential to bring the system together and unlock considerable efficiencies. UNHCR's own procurement rules, for example, now leverage mutual recognition to cut through layers of evaluation, checks and approvals. Seventeen agencies, including the UN Secretariat have signed the mutual recognition statement and the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), which I vice-chair, is leading its implementation.

The two-key country-level deliverables, the Business Operations Strategy (BOS) and Common Business Operations (CBO) are closely linked. The Project Team has revised and simplified the guidelines and procedures for the BOS and relaunched an enhanced online tool. A few possible models for a CBO that would build on the BOS are currently being tested, as one size does not fit all for location dependent back office consolidation. Both will be implemented by DCO.

Theoretically, Common Premises handshake well with the BOS and CBO, but significant change requires significant investments, both upfront and downstream, that have so far not been forthcoming. Instead, the project team has updated tools and guidance, tested them with some Country Teams, and is working to develop a common premises database to better track progress towards greater colocation. From there, it will be for the broader UN system to reflect on its commitment to common premises, recognizing it can have a range of non-financial benefits but also requires political support from member states who host our country teams around the world.

The final deliverable is both the most abstract and exciting – a network of global shared service centres, facilitating the centralized provision of enabling functions. The initial steps will be to catalogue what location-independent services are already available to buy and sell, and to establish a governance structure to promote standards and settle disputes. This is also an area where, frankly, as individual agencies' global shared service centres mature and technology advances, the capacity to centralize, integrate, and ultimately offer services to other agencies, will increase considerably.

Several lessons have emerged throughout the work of the BIG, including on the importance of broadening the narrative on system-wide efficiencies, but I would like to briefly elaborate two. The first is that work on efficiencies starts by analyzing available data and reviewing models to build an evidence-based business case before we propose specific changes. Doing it the other way around merely raises expectations that may not be met. The second is that such inter-agency efforts are most effective when done not as an exercise in consensus building but rather by taking that business case, developing a model which is scalable, and inviting willing agencies to get on board.

This opt-in principle not only allows us to stay data-driven but promotes individual agency efforts as the starting point of the most compelling innovation efforts in the system. The DSC is a prime example of this approach, as is the joint mobility partnership we are exploring with WFP to pool and offer our fleet management and asset disposal capacities worldwide. This is the most effective way for the system to galvanize and capitalize on the commitment of agencies such as UNHCR and WFP to pursue greater efficiency, and we encourage member states to work with us to push further.

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Finally, I would like to elaborate on one final element of the organisation's transformation, specifically efforts intended to reinforce the integrity of our operations and, more broadly, of the institution. We have worked hard to set a clear tone from the top with strong and ongoing internal messaging on accountability, abuse of authority and abuse of power, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

We have also taken up a leadership role within the system, including the High Commissioner's role as IASC Principals' Champion on Protection from SEA and SH and in my role as interim Chair of the CEB Task Force on Sexual harassment, because we want to push ourselves and our sister agencies further. Last week in New York I met with the Group of Friends against Sexual Harassment, where we discussed the implementation of task force deliverables such as the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment and the Model Code of Conduct, but also areas where more work can be done, such as data collection and analysis on investigations.

Internally, our rethink of oversight bodies and structures goes back to 2016 when we initiated a comprehensive review of our oversight systems and, building on this, embarked on a process to rationalise oversight and control functions to bring a greater degree of coherence among these and provide them with a previously absent point of convergence to coordinate their work.

The overall aim was to ensure that each function fully informs and supports management's broader institutional priorities, including making our Inspector General responsible for ensuring coherence among the different oversight functions; changing the interface between oversight and management by engaging the entire Senior Management Committee (SMC) on integrity matters, and; reviewing the management of relationships with both our internal and external auditors and our Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC), which benefits now from new leadership and composition.

These changes culminated in the issuance, in late 2019, of a Policy on Independent Oversight and a related Administrative Instruction on Conducting Investigations in UNHCR. The Policy builds on, and reflects, these changes by defining and confirming the authority and responsibilities of the different internal independent oversight functions of UNHCR; describing the complimentary roles played by external independent oversight functions and setting the roles and responsibilities of key UNHCR entities, including follow-up to findings and recommendations. The Policy introduces new roles and terms of employment for the Inspector General, including hiring (in consultation with the IAOC) for a non-renewable time-bound term of six years.

Our work to strengthen our culture, systems, processes, and informal and formal channels, will continue in 2020. And I am happy to say that, as these changes were being implemented, we were able to run a competitive selection process for a new Inspector General and complete the selection for this position.

Our new Inspector General, Mr. Anthony Garnett, will be joining us just a week and we owe a debt of gratitude to Ms. Karen Farkas, for her leadership in this period of transition and wish her well in her next assignment as UNHCR Representative in Tokyo.

Finally, I would like to close by returning to the topic of COVID-19. One of the possible impacts this could have is on our financial situation, which is deeply concerning, even in what are likely still the early days of an unfolding crisis. Especially given that we are transforming the way in which we plan, measure results and budget, I would therefore like to flag two immediate issues which could be exacerbated by this situation.

The first is that, our needs-based budget is higher this year than last, standing at \$8.668 billion for 2020, which coupled with a lower level of commitments to date, has already squeezed us on income. Second, cash flow is a worry since UNHCR has on average only two months coverage available in liquidity requirements, much lower than past years.

We are still undertaking a rapid assessment of the related risks, including for example of humanitarian funds being diverted to COVID-19 response, of private sector fundraising being hindered by the cancellation of events and Face-to-Face Fundraising, which is popular and productive in many parts of the world, and therefore the broader effect all of this has on entire industries and the economy as a whole. While we are not being alarmist, we do want to be prepared and we are trying to identify and treat the risks that are emerging from this rapidly evolving situation.

In that context, we would make a strong plea for donors to advance your contributions now to help us mitigate at least one significant risk we can already identify and allow us to respond to burgeoning needs in many parts of the world, including the Sahel, Syria, Somalia, Libya, Venezuela, and others, including the response to COVID-19 and preparations needed.

Thank you.