**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

**Standing Committee
63rd meeting**

UNHCR's communications strategy

Summary

This paper provides an overview of the key components of UNHCR's strategic approach to global communications. This is the first time an item on communications has appeared on the agenda of the Standing Committee, responding to Member States' interest in receiving further information on this area of UNHCR's work. There are no financial implications for consideration or decisions required of the Standing Committee.

Contents

I.   Introduction

1.   UNHCR's global communications seek to raise awareness about and mobilize public, political and financial support for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), stateless persons and others of concern to the Office. UNHCR's "global communication strategy" is an overarching framework that includes differentiated but integrated communications elements – both traditional and emerging – that range from digital platforms and social media, to advocacy campaigns and events, public information and news media, and the support of goodwill ambassadors and other "influencers", including from within the private sector. Fully aligned with the Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs),[1] UNHCR's approach provides a framework for strategic messaging and development of the UNHCR "brand." Considerable efforts are being made to expand the audience reach of UNHCR's communications, including through the use of engaging digital content, social media and search engine optimization.

II.   UNHCR's target audience and objectives

2.   UNHCR's communications target mainstream media at the international, regional and local levels, public and private donors, and "digital influencers",[2] as well as individuals and governments from donor and host countries and persons of concern themselves. UNHCR's communications strategy seeks to align communications at all levels to achieve the following objectives:

- stimulate global media coverage of refugees, IDPs, stateless persons and other persons of concern, including through stories of their courage and humanity;

- build support for countries hosting large numbers of refugees;

- generate sustained public, political and financial support for protection and solutions for refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR, as well as for their host communities;

- strengthen public awareness and support for the work of UNHCR, its partners, and host and donor countries;

- build a coherent and positive UNHCR "brand identity",[3] enhancing the Office's authority and reputation.

3.   To achieve these objectives, UNHCR has strengthened its public information and communications capacity, including by posting public information officers in major field operations and establishing a dynamic multimedia news and feature service. UNHCR highlights protection challenges through in-depth reports; regular briefing notes and other media outreach tools; and dedicated events that engage the general public on displacement and statelessness issues. A cornerstone of UNHCR's communications strategy has been to ensure a consolidated international digital presence, with UNHCR's main website (www.unhcr.org) at its centre. In order to promote consistency, UNHCR's communications staff in the field are encouraged to use a "communication strategy template", which facilitates the alignment of communications and operational objectives, including the GSPs.

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[1] The GSPs are outlined in UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2014-2015*, available at www.unhcr.org/ga14/index.xml, pp.14 – 17.
[2] "Digital influencers" are individuals who have the ability to shape the reach and impact of digital platforms, including social media.
[3] For purposes of this paper, "brand identity" and "brand" refer to the collective perception others have of an entity or organization such as UNHCR.

III. Elements of successful communications

4. Due to its early presence in field locations, UNHCR is uniquely situated to provide timely public information on refugee and displacement crises. Spokespeople are increasingly deployed along with emergency teams to engage with international media; and press releases, briefing notes, web stories, and accompanying social media provide a basis for fundraising and advocacy in new emergency situations. Multimedia production teams are also deployed to some emergency situations to provide photo, video and written coverage for external distribution.

5. Communications training is an integral part of emergency management training for staff, including as part of the Workshop on Emergency Management and the Senior Emergency Leadership Programme. Social media statistics suggest that users are particularly interested in the perspectives of humanitarian workers on the ground, and this can drive public support for the protection and assistance of persons of concern. UNHCR encourages field staff to engage with traditional media and on social media, as appropriate, and has issued guidelines to help manage communications by staff during emergencies. Experience has shown that the personal involvement of the High Commissioner enhances the reach and impact of UNHCR's communications in international media. The High Commissioner accordingly regularly undertakes high-profile media interviews and issues advocacy statements and op-ed articles.

6. UNHCR's global statistics on refugees and asylum-seekers are another important driver of global news media coverage. UNHCR's regular reporting documents attract high levels of media attention, particularly the annual *Global Trends* report, which is launched around World Refugee Day in June and consistently ranks highly amongst UNHCR's most viewed news stories.[4] Issue-based reports – such as *The Future of Syria*[5], *Rescue at Sea*[6] and *Woman Alone*[7] – also generate strong media coverage and serve as important advocacy tools.

7. With global displacement at its highest level on record, there is a temptation to emphasize numbers in order to command media space. However, sociological studies indicate that people are much more likely to take notice, empathize and become motivated to help if they are also presented with individual stories. Such stories accordingly continue to be a key focus of UNHCR communications. The work of Special Envoy Angelina Jolie, Eminent Advocate Sheikha Jawaher Bint Mohammed Al Qasimi of Sharjah, UNHCR's Goodwill Ambassadors and other high-profile supporters is also vital in drawing public attention to situations of forced displacement and statelessness.

8. Flagship events provide the Office with additional opportunities to highlight the plight of the forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The annual *World Refugee Day* campaign is the highest profile event of the calendar year, involving UNHCR offices worldwide. UNHCR has seen continual increases in media coverage, as well as stakeholder and public engagement, around this event. The *Nansen Refugee Award* ceremony, held in conjunction with the annual plenary session of the Executive Committee each year, is another valuable opportunity to draw attention to work being undertaken in support of refugees. It now serves as one of the Office's key advocacy platforms, garnering significant celebrity support and media attention worldwide.

9. In 2014, UNHCR launched a campaign to end statelessness by 2024. Dubbed the *"#IBELONG"* campaign to end statelessness within 10 years, the initiative focuses on advocacy with governments and enhancing public awareness of and engagement with the plight of stateless persons. The campaign is further discussed in the *Update on statelessness* (EC/66/SC/CRP.11).

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[4] UNHCR *Global Trends – 2014* will be released on 18 June 2015. UNHCR *Global Trends – 2013* is available at unhcr.org/trends2013/.

[5] Available at unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/

[6] Available at tracks.unhcr.org/2014/07/rescue-at-sea/

[7] Available at womanalone.unhcr.org/

IV.   Inclusive communications

10.   It is imperative that UNHCR's communications reflect the reality of its work. That is, UNHCR's ability to deliver protection, assistance and solutions to refugees and others of concern is realized through its partnerships – partnerships with host and affected countries, host communities, local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional organizations, other UN agencies and, of course, refugees, IDPs and stateless persons themselves. In this regard, UNHCR coordinates with partners when conducting high-profile global media campaigns on certain protection issues. Recent joint media campaigns on Syrian refugee children, Syrian refugee women, protection at sea and statelessness have received major coverage in traditional media as well as strong social media engagement.

11.   The success of several projects capturing the talents of refugees as artists, photographers and writers has confirmed public interest in hearing from refugees directly. The Office will continue to expand opportunities for refugees and displaced persons to participate in its communications, including through training on blogging and digital engagement for refugees and the publication of images taken by refugees in UNHCR's media and social media platforms.

V.   Multimedia innovation

A.   Digital presence

12.   The Office's core website – www.unhcr.org – registers an average of 1 million unique users every month. Presently, UNHCR has more than 70 distinct country and regional websites. While the availability of local content and the use of languages in addition to English enhance accessibility, the sheer number of websites can dissipate users' attention and negatively affects consistency and common messaging. Accordingly, UNHCR is consolidating its digital presence into a smaller set of websites that will include better search engine optimization and shared content management, while still supporting access in local languages. UNHCR expects to launch this reconfigured and redesigned version of www.unhcr.org in 2016, also integrating new UNHCR storytelling platforms such as http://tracks.unhcr.org.[8]

13.   Where possible, UNHCR seeks to maximize the use of new digital technologies, platforms and methodologies. For example, UNHCR increasingly produces video animations and "infographics" that not only make statistics more meaningful to audiences, but also can be embedded in websites and shared through social media. In the near future, UNHCR aims to create interactive timelines, "explainer videos" and data visualization tools. The Office has also introduced first person storytelling on digital platforms, in "reality TV" format. One example is *A Day in a Life*, a web series about Za'atari refugee camp that UNHCR produced in partnership with 'Yahoo!'.[9] The Office is presently working on a web series about Hany, a young Syrian refugee who had fled to Lebanon and is being resettled with his family in Canada. Hany's life has been documented by UNHCR for more than two years.

B.   Video and photography

14.   UNHCR employs professional video makers and photojournalists to document refugee situations around the world, helping to raise public awareness and build support for protection and humanitarian assistance. Their reports are filed to a small editorial team at

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[8] UNHCR launched tracks.unhcr.org in 2014 as a platform for multimedia storytelling. It publishes extraordinary stories about, and sometimes by, individual refugees, IDPs and humanitarian workers, featuring stories that are unexpected, beautifully shot, memorable and worthy of sharing.
[9] The series is available at uk.news.yahoo.com/zaatari/.

UNHCR's headquarters who is responsible for packaging and distribution. Editorial teams also shoot live and recorded interviews and prepare short video stories and B-roll[10], which are shared daily with Reuters and the European Broadcasting Union. UNHCR's archive of photographs dating back over 60 years is one of the most comprehensive archives of humanitarian crises and displacement since World War II. Professional photos are distributed to photo agencies and used for fundraising and reporting purposes.

C. Social media

15. UNHCR has a strong presence on social media and was an early adopter of many important platforms. At the global level, UNHCR's "@Refugees" Twitter account has over 1.7 million followers, and its Facebook page (www.facebook.com/UNHCR) has over 700,000 page "likes". The Office has an increasing presence on Instagram, Flickr and YouTube. UNHCR's social media strategy aims to highlight UNHCR's work in the field on behalf of persons of concern. To ensure consistency and quality, the Office has issued administrative instructions on the use of social media by staff. More than 500 staff have received in-person and online training on the use of social media, helping to ensure that timely, high-quality content is regularly shared from the field.

16. Content shared on social media can have a wide reach. For example, a video[11] created by *Sverige för UNHCR* (Sweden for UNHCR) using Google's image search function generated 3 million views on UNHCR's Facebook page and was shared by 51,000 people. UNHCR publishes between 20 and 30 tweets per day, two to three Facebook posts per day, one to two Instagram posts per day, and two to three YouTube videos per week on its main global social media accounts. Since 2013, the Office has seen an 81 per cent increase in views on its YouTube platform, a 75 per cent growth in Facebook page "likes", and a 15 per cent increase in Twitter followers (comparatively lower because of the large existing audience).

D. Distribution of digital content

17. The Office has begun migrating its extensive photo library onto a secure, "cloud-based" platform that enables staff, journalists, partners and the public to search and download images for print and online use, subject to certain rights and permissions. This platform – a digital asset management system known as Cortex and developed by Orange Logic – will soon be used to distribute many other forms of digital content as well, including video, press releases, "infographics", data sets and portable digital format (PDF) documents. It will assist UNHCR to better manage growth in media production and communications and to meet the needs of internal and external users.

VI. The UNHCR "brand"

18. Research undertaken by Gallup in 2014 revealed that UNHCR was not as well-known to the public as some of its humanitarian peers, such as UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). As a result, the Office has initiated a process to review and enhance the UNHCR "brand". Subsequent to the Gallup research, a general population survey involving 8,000 interviews was undertaken in eight countries. The results provide a picture of how audiences currently view the UNHCR "brand" and give indications of what would motivate them to be more engaged with, support, or donate to UNHCR.

19. A brand position for UNHCR is under development to outline, in accessible terms, what UNHCR is as an organization, what UNHCR does, and why it matters. A key result of this process will be a "global brand book", providing a variety of tools including a core

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[10] "B-roll" is supplemental video footage provided to news organizations for use in their own stories.
[11] "Search for Syria," http://rfg.ee/Nf0Eo

message framework, a communications model, guidelines on the use of UNHCR's logo, an image library, and a comprehensive style guide. The brand position will have supporting messaging to enable staff to deliver a consistent and meaningful story across media platforms. It is expected that the "global brand book" will be introduced in late 2015/early 2016.

20.   The brand review and development relate to one component of a "strategic communications strategy" that was approved in December 2013. The strategy also proposes advocacy campaigns to enhance public support and endorses evidence-based assessments of UNHCR communications, elements which have been discussed above.

VII.   Communications and fundraising

21.   Strategic communications play an important role not only in garnering public support and understanding for refugees and others of concern, but also in motivating the public and others to financially support the work of the Office and its partners. In 2014, private sector contributions exceeded US$ 208 million. Across UNHCR's global network of private sector fundraising operations in more than 20 countries, and digital language hubs in English, Spanish and Arabic, strategic communications are integrated with fundraising. UNHCR's fundraising communication is underpinned by market research into drivers of donor loyalty and engagement, including the brand research discussed above. Guided by such insights, the Office develops targeted communication for its diverse donor audiences, including individuals, private philanthropists, companies and foundations. At the same time, UNHCR recognizes that those who support the work of the Office – including host countries, donors and operational partners – expect UNHCR to provide visibility to their contributions. In this regard, the Office has developed guidelines on donor visibility in the field.

VIII.   Communications monitoring and analysis

22.   UNHCR monitors the impact of its communications through written assessments, including assessments of individual campaigns and events, media drives, celebrity support missions and digital platforms. The Office now conducts quarterly reviews of its global communications, and an annual review for 2014 was recently completed. These reports assess media coverage relevant to UNHCR and provide insight into UNHCR "brand" visibility; top performing news stories; the geographic focus of media coverage; the performance of UNHCR's digital platforms; and the share of media coverage UNHCR receives in comparisons with other UN agencies and NGOs. They inform the development of future strategies and tools, identify areas for improvement, and note good practices. Looking forward, the Office hopes to develop a training module on media monitoring for staff in the field, to assist them with monitoring at the country and regional levels.

IX.   Conclusion

23.   Maintaining an effective, flexible and responsive approach to global communications is crucial as UNHCR seeks to raise awareness about, and provide protection and assistance to, refugees, IDPs, stateless persons and others of concern. In light of the fast-evolving communications landscape, UNHCR will continue to assess its global communications to ensure that an innovative, integrated strategy across media platforms drives public engagement and donor support for persons of concern.

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