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Staff safety and security

Summary

This paper provides an update on the measures UNHCR is taking from a security perspective to fulfil its duty of care to staff, especially in high-risk locations, since the report EC/68/SC/CRP.27 was presented at the 70th meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2017.

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I. Introduction

1. UNHCR personnel are often exposed to security threats when providing assistance to people who are forced to flee their homes, in particular in emergencies that are generated or exacerbated by conflict. The organization currently has 447 offices with a workforce of more than 15,800 people around the world. Of these, over 22 per cent are based in duty stations that are deemed to be at the United Nations assessed threat levels of substantial or higher.
2. Although three UNHCR personnel were seriously injured in armed attacks in Mali and Yemen, effective risk management measures have helped prevent the loss of life to UNHCR personnel while on duty during the past 12 months. Fatal incidents affecting operations did nonetheless occur, including the killing of a United Nations peacekeeping soldier escorting a humanitarian convoy in South Sudan, in which UNHCR participated.
3. The Field Security Service strives to ensure that security risk-management measures are fit for purpose and that security procedures are followed, by deploying well-trained Field Security Advisers to areas of the highest operational risk, the strategic engagement with the wider United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) and by ensuring operational decisions take into account the operational criticality and security risks. UNHCR also fully cooperates and liaises with Member States and host governments to ensure the security of personnel operating in the field.

II. Operating in challenging security environments

4. UNHCR is guided by UNSMS to identify and reduce the risk of security threats and other hazards to its personnel and assets. In this regard, UNHCR Field Security Advisers undertake security risk assessments, provide outreach and employ community-based acceptance approaches to ensure that populations and parties to conflicts understand the Office's protection and assistance mandate.
5. UNHCR personnel reported 404 security incidents in 2017, an increase of 36 per cent compared to 2016 and a 47 per cent increase compared to 2015. Of these, 253 were incidents linked to criminal activities. The overall growth in the number of incidents can largely be explained by the organization's efforts to make sure that incidents are reported, as well as the increased number of staff working in high-risk operational areas.
6. In Afghanistan, the move of the office and guesthouses in Kabul to a new compound mitigated security risks to UNHCR personnel in the country. So far in 2018, at least seven attacks have taken place in the vicinity of the previous premises occupied by UNHCR, while none have occurred close to the new facility.
7. In Mali, an ambush on a UNHCR vehicle in late 2017 left two UNHCR staff members seriously injured, requiring immediate medical evacuation. In a recent shooting incident, serious harm was avoided because personnel were driving an armoured vehicle.
8. In Somalia, the principal security threats affecting United Nations staff involve attacks by armed groups with improvised explosive devices, kidnapping and detention, as well as harassment of national staff. The operating environment in Somalia remains volatile, with frequent attacks occurring in close proximity to United Nations facilities. Cross-border attacks from Somalia have also taken place near the refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya, with ambushes on a weekly basis targeting the police who help ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel.
9. In the Equatorias region of South Sudan, ambushes of humanitarian convoys are frequent. A UNHCR armoured vehicle was struck by gunfire but no staff members were injured. In a separate ambush, a staff member of a partner organization was killed. Reports

on incidents involving the international humanitarian community, including the United Nations, in South Sudan indicated that during the first seven months of 2018, seven humanitarian aid workers have been killed, 11 wounded and 34 held hostage. A recent attack on the humanitarian community in Bunj-Mban resulted in one staff member suffering minor injuries and UNHCR premises and assets being damaged. As a result of these incidents, some humanitarian organizations have suspended and/or reduced their delivery of vital assistance. UNHCR is working hard to ensure a conducive security environment for a complete resumption of activities.

10. Conflict in parts of the Central African Republic continued to force people to search for safety in other towns and neighbouring States. Security incidents in the country have resulted in the death of 16 national humanitarian workers over the past year.

11. Political tensions and armed conflict in some areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have increased the security risks, including due to criminality, kidnapping, gender- and ethnically-based violence and harassment of humanitarian workers. Incidents of armed conflict throughout North and South Kivu, Tanganyika and the Kasai region have occurred on a frequent basis in 2017 and 2018. The proximity of armed conflict, ethnic tensions and violent incidents to areas of operations, seriously hampered field missions.

12. In Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, humanitarian workers were continuously exposed to direct and indirect threats. In November 2017, a UNHCR national staff member was shot and seriously injured in Yemen as a result of fighting near his residence, and he was subsequently evacuated to Jordan for medical treatment.

13. UNHCR is actively trying to reduce the risk of road accidents. The number of injured staff members slightly decreased in 2017 compared to 2016, from 20 to 18 people, and there were no fatalities. The organization continues to raise awareness through training programmes for staff and managers. In high-risk operations, drivers are taught defensive driving skills.

III. UNHCR's security strategy

14. UNHCR's strategy to strengthen the security of personnel, partner staff and persons of concern is outlined in the "Culture of security 2017-2019: an updated plan of action", using five main categories: (i) advice and support; (ii) the security workforce; (iii) governance and oversight; (iv) liaison and partnership; and (v) training.

A. Advice and support

15. Field operations are provided with security advice and support, notably through the deployment of Field Security Advisers that identify and analyse risks and advise on the implementation of appropriate risk management measures. In the event of a security or critical incident, UNHCR strives to ensure that personnel receive appropriate medical, psychological and administrative support.

16. The organization retains stockpiles of security equipment, which can be deployed rapidly to improve basic risk mitigation. These include armoured vehicles, access-control and perimeter security equipment, lighting, personal protective equipment, glass-shatter resistant film and video surveillance systems, sound barriers and personal attack alarms.

17. Communication is paramount in any security crisis and the organization continues to ensure that effective means of communication are available in remote locations, including by finding solutions to ensure effective inter-agency operability and providing the means to communicate to partners.

18. Security equipment is tested to ensure its effectiveness in case of attacks with improvised explosive devices. A structural engineer provides direct support to implement measures to mitigate such attacks and has developed a tool to determine the initial vulnerability of premises. The tool is proving effective particularly in cases when new buildings are being considered as potential premises. It is also a cost saving measure, given that the structural engineer can now provide remote guidance in a timely manner and does not have to travel to assess each and every premise.

B. Security workforce

19. UNHCR's security professionals cooperate closely with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and other partners to ensure coordinated, system-wide approaches. They also have the specific ability and expertise with regard to the security of persons of concern to the Office, which is essential to ensuring the organization's ability to respond in challenging environments. UNHCR has 88 international and almost 200 locally-recruited security staff. Eighteen Field Security Advisers were recruited in 2017 and 2018 and were mostly located in particularly challenging environments, supporting UNHCR operations and partner organizations where there were no other UN security personnel present. This workforce is managed from Headquarters by the Field Security Service, which also provided surge capacity when needed. Together with the Division of Human Resources, efforts are underway to ensure a diverse workforce and to recruit Field Security Advisers from different regions, with due consideration for gender.

C. Governance and oversight

20. Appropriate oversight is a critical aspect of security management. The Security Steering Committee, led by UNHCR's senior management at Headquarters, remains a key mechanism in this regard.

21. The Office is committed to ensuring that funding is made available to meet the minimum operating security standards (MOSS) and any other appropriate risk management measures. As of December 2017, 438 of UNHCR's 447 offices (98 per cent) were MOSS compliant, thereby maintaining one of the highest compliance rates in the United Nations. The remaining nine offices, including those that were recently established to respond to emerging situations, are working to achieve full compliance without delay.

22. UNHCR continued to ensure that funds for security are appropriately managed. In 2017, security-related costs portion amounted to 2.4 per cent of the overall budget, including the organization's contribution to UNDSS of \$7.882 million. In 2018, this contribution increased to \$8.674 million.

D. Liaison and partnership

23. UNHCR actively supported UNDSS and other members of the Inter-Agency Security Management Network to develop policies and procedures for UNSMS. The Office continued to lead the working group on gender in security management, and a manual has been developed for security personnel of UNSMS in managing and responding to gender-based threats. UNHCR also participated in inter-agency working groups on compliance, safety-risk management, technical security standards, air travel, road safety security training and telecommunications for security standards.

24. UNHCR remained an active member of the Saving Lives Together Oversight Committee. As part of its commitment and with a focus on gender in security management,

the Office facilitated a workshop with the World Food Programme for the European Interagency Security Forum to enable their respective members to develop a gender security awareness training.

25. The organization engaged with host governments, to ensure the security of United Nations operations, programmes and personnel, to raise awareness on humanitarian principles and to ensure that any activities and interaction with the military are in line with the United Nations Civil Military Coordination guidance.

26. UNHCR leads the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) task force on duty of care. As part of this process, the Field Security Service contributes to the ongoing organizational efforts to ensure a holistic approach to duty of care in line with the recommendations adopted at HLCM level. The Field Safety Service provided briefings, including through webinars to UNHCR personnel who are being considered for deployment to high-risk duty stations.

E. Training

27. UNHCR's flagship security programme, the "security management learning programme", continued to provide managers with the knowledge and skills necessary to manage the security aspects of their country operation. The learning programme is reinforced by a tailored "security management exercise" training. Both components prioritize staff members serving in high-risk duty stations.

28. As part of the requirement to operate in high-risk environments, the Office also co-facilitated the delivery of "safe and secure awareness for field environments" training and "hostile environment security" training. In addition, UNHCR's security workforce delivered additional training based on specific operational environments of staff members.

29. Recognizing that women face different security threats than men, and as a result of the training of trainers conducted in 2017, the Office has rolled out the "women's security awareness" training programme. To date, more than 400 women from UNHCR and partner organizations in nine countries have participated in this training.
