

Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
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**Agenda Item: 2. (C.) (i) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/70/SC/CRP.21)
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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies,

It is a great pleasure for me to address the Committee for the first time since I have taken on the role of HR Director ten months ago in December 2018, and it is with great pride that I do so looking at what we have achieved thus far, while reminding ourselves that **any transformation is a marathon not a sprint.**

At the last update, we were setting up the human resources transformation to ensure a fit-for-purpose people function at UNHCR. As you may be aware, UNHCR launched a review of its human resources division, systems and processes at the end of 2017. This has led to a multi-year transformation agenda to modernize human resources and be closer to the field, simplify processes, increase efficiencies, and deliver HR services in partnership with employees and managers with our people in focus.

Since then, UNHCR has embarked on a broader journey of transformation, creating great synergies with the HR transformation, with many opportunities to converge and strengthen how people management happens at UNHCR. For UNHCR's amazing workforce of nearly 17,000 colleagues, the transformation means an opportunity to work in a more modern and people-centric organization for the same great purpose that has shaped UNHCR's global legacy to date.

That purpose is why our people join UNHCR. For many this is more than a job, it is a calling fuelled by the belief that they are making a difference for the people we serve. Our people are our greatest asset and together we are an extraordinary and diverse workforce delivering amazing results around the world. As we become increasingly people-centric in the way we deliver, the experience of each employee becomes a critical part in ensuring that everyone is motivated, skilled and able to contribute to their best ability. A great employee experience starts before a candidate even joins UNHCR, moves through all the stages of recruitment, individual growth and development in various jobs, until he or she leaves and becomes an alumni recommending UNHCR as an employer of choice for the next generation- starting all over again in a sort of eternity loop.

In today's connected world this experience is holistic and looks at things like: How is my relationship with my manager and colleagues? How smooth was my onboarding? How secure do I feel in this duty station? Do I have access to healthcare? Did I get paid on time and do I understand my payslip? How was my parental leave? Do I have the IT tools to get my work done no matter where I am? Do I find the necessary support when I need it? Can I work from home when my child is sick?

Our employees look at what happens at work as an integrated experience, and do not think of issues in siloed entities, belonging exclusively to HR, IT, or facilities or operations. Each of us contribute to shaping this employee experience; as employees, colleagues, managers, leaders and HR and it is a great opportunity for us to ensure it is positive by viewing our work through the lens of how our people experience their work day at UNHCR.

A positive employee experience leads to an engaged employee who is fulfilled in his role, with a good work-life balance, gives to the organization, and serves the mandate. When we take better care of our people, they are better equipped to focus on what matters most, namely to work with the displaced, the refugees and the stateless wherever they are in the world. This is at the heart of UNHCR's employee value proposition, which we have developed in 2019.

Given the holistic nature of the employee experience, managers play a key role in this. This is why we are positioning people management as a corporate priority, with the understanding that people often do not leave jobs but leave managers. We need to ensure that going forward people management is prioritised in operations and not something that happens at the end of the day, when everything else is done. Good people management is by its very nature a partnership, where manager and employee lean into the relationship supported by HR. If this doesn't happen or relationships go wrong, the price is high, resulting in tensions and stress in the workplace at best, and serious misconduct at worst. While it is difficult for individuals, it is simply unaffordable for UNHCR as an organization in terms of credibility and trust. This is why we will invest in improving the people management skills of our current and aspiring managers, making this as much of a priority as technical skills and field experience.

As UNHCR embarked in a broader transformation journey, we were now not only aligned with the general direction of the organization, but also had further opportunity to pilot our partnership model. We have strived to ensure the regionalization and decentralization process is as people-centric as possible. For that, we have put in place support measures to accompany colleagues through the change and offered a voluntary separation programme to colleagues who felt ready to leave UNHCR.

The Division of Human Resources is partnering with Bureaux on job descriptions, vacancy management, assignment, and on managing the deployment of colleagues and their families. This is being done with often tight processing times and with the acknowledgment of the possible anxiety related to uncertainty and change. We are pleased to report that the assignment process for the new Bureaux is well on track. At the beginning of this month, out of 264 positions advertised for the Bureaux at the P2-D1 levels, 74% have been filled. More than half (53%) of these assignments have been filled by women. All of this additional work was possible thanks to our incredibly dedicated HR team, to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude.

A key feature of our partnership model is happening in the regions, where I am pleased to report that all seven Regional Bureaux have Regional HR teams embedded in the new structure. These teams will be led by Senior HR partners, a role new to UNHCR that is strategic in nature and key to our HR transformation. A few weeks ago, we have launched the beginning of the HR partners' 12-month induction plan, as we believe that solid support and a tight relationship with human resources at headquarters, from the Strategic Workforce team to Talent Development, People Analytics, and others, will be key to their success.

The HR partners bring strategic HR advice and services closer to country operations while serving as the interface between headquarters and country operations, in strong partnership with the regional directors. One such example of this partnership will be the HR partners' support to regional directors in the management of the newly delegated HR authorities.

For that it is essential that our focus on partnership is complemented with a strong internal HR community. Over 500 colleagues worldwide have human resources functions in their role. They might not have HR in their title, however they are supporting colleagues locally in these tasks. We have been ensuring that they are updated on the work of the Division, that their voice and feedback is heard, and we continue to build together UNHCR's HR community. This will prove valuable in ensuring consistency in the partnership approach of HR everywhere.

HR Partners will also be key allies to managers on people management supporting them on their journey. In addition, we have put a stronger focus on leadership development and have integrated talent development with performance to strengthen the management skills of our current and future leaders, including how they work with their people and manage resources. This was possible through the reconfiguration of the Global Learning and Development Centre and as the teams become fully staffed and settle in the new structure, we expect positive results on the employee's experience from the angles of development, retention, and employability. Even during this transition, the Global Learning and Development Centre was able to reach out to 16,167 UNHCR colleagues who participated in at least one learning activity in the past year.

Support to equipping leaders include executive coaching and mentoring programmes. Coaching has been mainstreamed in management learning programmes and in the Inter-Agency Coordination Learning Programme, as part of building up people management skills such as self-awareness. A trait of emotional intelligence, self-awareness is key to understanding ourselves and how we relate to others, enabling us to work and lead more effectively. A pilot mentoring programme has also been launched, targeting female staff at the P4 level, new external recruits at P4/P5 level, and colleagues assigned in the new Bureaux.

As part of building a stronger and more people-centric leadership culture at UNHCR we have also invested in and learned from the reflections of 50 UNHCR female leaders at the two editions of the **Women and Humanitarian Leadership Forum** that we organized in 2018 and 2019. These conversations help shape the people management culture through the lens of gender and diversity. Our journey towards inclusion starts with ensuring all voices in the organization are heard. Creativity and innovation happen when all colleagues are empowered to bring their diverse perspectives to the table.

In that regard, we welcome the increased focus on system-wide benchmarking on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and on gender. We are pleased to report that we just received an encouraging scorecard for our progress towards gender parity as part of the 2018 reporting on the UN Gender Parity System-Wide Action Plan. We look forward to contributing with other entities at UNHCR to keep fostering an inclusive culture where diverse teams thrive.

Speaking of other entities, we continue to play an active role in shaping the UN Reform Agenda and the UN Common System through regular exchanges with other organizations; be it with the Business Innovation Group to identify joint opportunities for collaboration; through the HR Network or in shaping the dialogue around the **Future of Work** in the High Level Committee on Management and how we create a work environment where we make the workplace more human in a time of bots, artificial intelligence and automation.

Our focus on partnering and on people management is made possible when our people are focusing on what matters and not spending time on burdensome processes. We are constantly looking for innovation in how we do things by introducing efficiencies and measuring our progress. For example, I am now pleased to introduce to the Committee our latest hard-working colleague, ARiN, working around the clock. ARiN is an artificial intelligence system that we have developed to assist recruiters in the screening of applications. Up until very recently, the Division was manually reviewing tens of thousands of applications on a yearly basis for its 30 Talent Pool profiles. As you know, the main role of the talent pool is to respond to international temporary staffing needs of the organization. The screening of this high number of applications is time consuming and labour-intensive, yet, it is a necessary exercise through which best candidates are identified who can fill our staffing gaps. ARiN has increased our screening capacity; for instance, education credentials and years of experience are now checked in seconds. More importantly, it allowed more time for candidates' nurturing and interaction with managers to better understand their staffing needs.

The digitalization of the fitness to work process is another example of efficiencies introduced to enhance the employee experience with a direct impact on our ability to deliver fast and our duty of care to our people. The medical clearance for fitness to work is a recurring theme in the employee journey at UNHCR. Its digitalization speeds up the process and saves time for everyone, enabling colleagues to get out and do the work that matters quicker as and when they are needed.

As part of our efforts to support colleagues serving in some of our toughest locations, we are always looking to improve living and working conditions and exploring new ways of managing UNHCR accommodations in the field. **The Humanitarian Booking Hub**, the online field services platform, allows colleagues to make better informed choices on their living conditions ahead of their assignment. Since our last update, it has grown to allow colleagues to have more information on where they are going, on facilities on site, on booking appointments with a clinic or a staff counsellor, UN flight schedules, real-time safety advice, and tips on staying healthy.

As we are getting close to mental health day, I also wish to reiterate our strong commitment to the UN Mental Health Strategy, which is a priority for all organizations but one that we have made real by recently pledging in-kind support. Our work is harsh and demanding and we have an obligation to ensure a humanitarian environment that accepts and understands mental health challenges and combats the stigmas and stereotypes that exist around mental health in order to ensure our people see real change in the workplace.

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies,

To conclude, what our people can expect from our transformation is a more advanced and people-centric function that is field-driven and client-oriented, and that delivers highly efficient HR services in partnership with managers and employees. A Division of Human Resources with a strong focus on creating a positive employee experience, where employees find purpose in their work with UNHCR and are empowered to take charge of their careers in partnership with their managers and HR - from entry to exit - in a more flexible and agile organization closer to the people we serve.

With that I invite you to join us on this journey of transformation and hope to further engage with you on the thinking around the workforce of the future. In a rapidly changing world where technology and automation play an increasingly important role, UNHCR looks to a future where the work environment is powered by technology but offers a more human and people-centric experience. As we continue to adapt, learn from each other and adopt best practices to stay relevant, UNHCR would welcome further discussions with its partners on how to get there, and make sure that we have the right people in the right place at the right time when it matters.

Thank you.