

Statement of the Rapporteur

Sub-item 6(b): Oral update on the Excom conclusion

Thank you Mr. Chairperson,

Let me first say that it is a great pleasure and honour to be formally addressing the Committee for the first time in the capacity of Rapporteur, since my appointment in late December last year. I had the opportunity to meet with new delegates in February, at the UNHCR's briefing session, and I am looking forward to working closely with you all in the coming months.

As you all know, since 1975, when the first Executive Committee Conclusion establishing the Sub-Committee and General Conclusion on International Protection was adopted, the Conclusions on International Protection have served as an important source of guidance on protection and solutions for the High Commissioner, Member States, and other stakeholders.

With over 100 such Conclusions adopted in 40 years, this Committee has been guided by the purely humanitarian nature of UNHCR's mandate, and that humanitarian character remains at their heart.

At the 65th session of the Executive Committee held in October last year, whereby a decision had been made not to adopt a Conclusion, former Chairperson H.E. Ambassador Choi and many delegations expressed their strong support for the continuation of Conclusions and urged that the membership find a way to take the process forward in a constructive way.

Since that time, the Executive Committee Bureau has reflected on this at several meetings. The Chairperson, Vice-Chairs and I have also benefitted from the comments and insights of a number of delegations who have informally shared their views with us.

Last week, the Bureau met to discuss methods of work and options on the way forward which I am pleased to share our collective thoughts with you.

As you know, the Executive Committee is a growing body. With 94 Members today, we have a membership over three times larger than it was back when Conclusions were first adopted 40 years ago. This growth has made the Committee stronger, bringing a greater diversity of views and experience to our common work supporting protection and solutions for the world's refugees and other persons of concern to UNHCR. At the same time, the growing size of the Committee can make the negotiation of ExCom Conclusions more complex and undoubtedly more difficult to reach consensus on the most challenging themes to be addressed.

In this context, Member States have made several important suggestions on how should we select and negotiate ExCom Conclusions. With regard to selection of the theme, there is a desire for greater predictability, appropriate and sufficient groundwork leading up to the process of preparation and negotiation. The Bureau concurs that these are important points and has reflected on how to move forward in a constructive manner. We have also considered positive experiences from past years, including times when a slate of several themes was agreed for work in the years ahead, such as through the Agenda for Protection. Moreover, to further strengthen engagement and cooperation within the Bureau in the

preparation of ExCom Conclusions, the Bureau is looking at ways that other Bureau members, such as Vice-Chair, can lend additional support to the Rapporteur in such process.

In this spirit, I would like to suggest the following steps which reflect collective thoughts of the Bureau as the way to proceed:

Firstly, in the coming weeks, I will arrange an opportunity that would enable us to consult on potential themes for agreement in a multi-year work plan.

Secondly, since the June meeting is devoted to protection, and as the documentation for that meeting and our discussions often identify critical protection and solutions gaps, on which guidance might be warranted, they could form one of the sources from where themes could be identified. In this spirit, we have asked the UNHCR to highlight more explicitly areas where guidance from the Committee would contribute to strengthening our collective work on protection and solutions, such as through the Note on International Protection and other protection-related papers submitted to the Committee.

Thirdly, we should also continue working closely with the new Assistant High Commissioner for Protection on the new protection vision for the years to come, and how the Conclusions can help providing guidance to UNHCR's work.

Moving to a multi-year work plan would, we believe, have several benefits. It would give the greater clarity and predictability that is desired. It would enable us to agree to several valuable themes as a package, ensuring that a diversity of topics will be in a pipeline of being addressed, instead of selecting a new theme for discussion every year.

In addition, a longer-lead time for some themes would allow us, in our planning meeting each year, to ensure that our programme of work and our schedule of informal meetings and briefings are supportive of the important protection and solutions themes we have prioritized. Indeed, once a theme had been agreed, the Bureau could enhance the preparatory process through organizing timely briefings, arranging for expert advice and consultations with partners, and facilitating discussions in our meetings. A better preparatory process would enable us to focus the negotiations, once begun, on the text of the draft Conclusion.

That, I believe, summarizes the Bureau's reflection on what concerns the membership has expressed, and how we might seek to address them, with your support.

In practical terms, this means that we would seek to reach agreement on a short list of themes to be taken up in the next couple of years, therefore laying the foundations for a solid protection or solutions conclusion in 2016 and beyond. Of course, if there were a theme quickly emerging with solid and broad support, we could initiate preparations for its discussion in-depth later this year.

This might appear to be a new approach, so I look forward to receiving your thoughts on this proposal. I would also like to thank the Bureau for its support in this process and count on your very welcome collaboration during the year.

Thank you.