

Remarks for the 74th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Item 3.a - Revision of the Terms of Reference of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee

Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Room XVII, Palais des Nations
5-7 March 2019

Mister Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates

In September of 2016 we discussed the political commitment of unprecedented force and resonance constituted by the New York Declaration adopted that month.

As a result and in preparation for the Global Compact on Refugees adopted in December of last year, I noted at the time that our organisation needed to be prepared to take advantage of this historic opportunity despite a challenging international context; requiring our organisation to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible.

It was on that basis, and guided by advice provided by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, or IAOC, and a number of other bodies, including the Standing Committee, that we decided to embark on a comprehensive review of oversight functions.

We shared further information on this review of oversight functions during an Informal Consultative Briefing in October of 2016 and noted that the consultant's review focused on existing oversight functions in UNHCR and their relationship with broader structures and processes that support management in monitoring the organization. The consultant's main findings were that while UNHCR had made major efforts to strengthen oversight functions in the past decade, this had led to a "mushrooming of control functions and compliance demands" and a pervasive sense of "oversight fatigue" at the operational level.

The consultant recommended that oversight and control functions be rationalized and that the Office adjust both the specific roles of its individual oversight services as well as the coordination among them. Following consideration of the consultant's recommendations, the High Commissioner decided to consolidate the structure of UNHCR's oversight functions, making the Inspector General responsible for ensuring coherence among the different functions. The High Commissioner further decided that, to ensure the Inspector General's independence and impartiality, the position would be subject to external recruitment, with a time-limited mandate, and that he would seek the advice of the IAOC on the appointment and, if needed, early termination of the Inspector General's contract.

Changes to the IAOC's terms of reference will be required to allow this body to take on these additional functions. Following consultations with the IAOC we suggest the addition, under section 2 of the IAOC's terms of reference, outlining the body's mandate, of an additional clause relating to the provision of "advice to the High Commissioner on the appointment and early termination of UNHCR's Inspector General".

In addition to this change, and based on our discussions with the IAOC, and subsequent discussions with a number of member states following our recent Informal Consultative Meeting on this topic, we suggest adding, in Section three, two areas of desirable experience for IAOC members. These are the “prevention and control of fraud, corruption and other forms of misconduct of financial and non-financial nature” and “evaluation”.

With these suggested changes, we believe the IAOC will be well positioned to advise the High Commissioner on the appointment, and eventual early termination of a key position within our third line of defence, one which will work to ensure coherence between our offices’ oversight functions

Thank you.