

Remarks for the 80th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
23-25 March 2021

Madam Chair,
Excellencies,

Last year I opened this session of the Standing Committee by welcoming “those of you tuning in remotely,” noting the efforts we had undertaken to continue to operate. I noted that we were soon to appeal for an initial \$30 million to support prevention and response efforts in displacement situations and host countries in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. Those days seem like a distant memory now.

We have reported since then on our significant efforts to respond to the needs of the people we serve. I won't go into detail here, as this will be covered under agenda item 3 by the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Regional Bureau Directors, but will note a few elements linked to our efforts to mobilise resources to respond to COVID-specific requirements.

In the early days of the pandemic, faced with extraordinary and unexpected new challenges, our teams worked hard to reprioritize and reallocate resources to meet immediate needs. This exercise highlighted the utility of the Operational Reserve, together with the precious role of unearmarked funding, to meet these unexpected requirements until we were able to take stock and appeal to you to help us resource them.

We've previously discussed the \$745 million which we appealed to cover COVID-19 related needs in 2020, and our deliberate efforts to keep this segment of the \$10 billion COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan strictly focussed on the most immediate needs of people we serve and those who host them. We are proud that despite overstretched operations, undersubscribed requirements, adapted delivery methods, and new activities to meet COVID-19 related needs, we have reached record levels of implementation in 2020 across all regions.

Importantly, we were able to see the benefits of our new decentralised management in responding to the pandemic. Mr. Mazou will touch upon this in the upcoming agenda item, so I'll limit myself to saying that we are pleased that our new organisational setup was resilient and responsive in the face of this crisis.

We talked in September about how the pandemic was both a “stress test” for our newly decentralised design and played a significant role in accelerating change across the organisation. This acceleration has continued in intervening months, making the direct and substantive engagement of colleagues around the world key to our transformation's success. A Field Reference Group, under Mr. Mazou's leadership, draws representation from across the organization to serve as a virtual sounding board, helping guide the ongoing transformation.

The progressive realignment of Headquarters remains our plan; it was initiated during the 2021 planning process and will continue over the next few planning cycles. We will consolidate and strengthen these shifts through simplified and improved business processes, and modernizing aging corporate systems.

We are pursuing this crucial dimension of UNHCR's change process through the Business Transformation Programme or BTP. The BTP impacts our processes, policies and service delivery and aims to liberate time to focus on protecting and aiding the people we serve. The Programme involves

a fundamental re-think and redesign of our planning, human resource and financial management, and supply chain.

The BTP provides an essential opportunity to overhaul and optimise our ways of working, leveraging current technology, and giving us access to the latest know-how for internal processes, which we intend to adopt rather than customize, as UNHCR has done in the past. We will share more with you on the BTP at the next Standing Committee meeting in July.

The BTP is an ambitious programme, which is crucial to the success of UNHCR's transformation. To help lead this effort, we welcome back Steve Corliss, the new Director for Change, who will ensure an effective link between Headquarters and operations, while maintaining coherence amongst the individual projects. To this task, Steve brings his recent experience and perspective as the former Representative in Bangladesh. He is supported by the Transformation and Change Service and, to reinforce this important initiative, we are also bringing on board another senior UNHCR Representative as the BTP Programme Director.

In sum, this transformation will launch forward the organisation's overall business model in support of the Global Compact on Refugees. It is in line with UN Reform efforts and its efficiency agenda, and UNHCR's long standing commitment to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its delivery. This will also be a key component of our contribution to the Secretary General's Common Agenda, and how management and enabling functions support a renewal of multilateralism and a repositioning of the UN to respond better to current and future challenges. We believe that the ultimate measure of success is the positive difference we make collectively in the lives of the people we serve.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates,

Complementing the changes in the way we do business, I wish to highlight a couple of other areas of reform which will make us an even stronger organization. In the realm of partner management, we have continued to drive reforms and simplify our procedures and harmonize them with other UN agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated several of these reforms, including shortening partnership agreements; streamlining controls; and simplifying budget requirements with greater flexibility for partners to course-correct during the year.

In the integrity portfolio, the High Commissioner recently issued a new policy (perhaps the first in the UN system) on a Victim Centred Approach in UNHCR's response to Sexual Misconduct. This policy creates a framework to put survivors at the centre of the organisation's actions, and ensure that victims' voices are not only heard, but inform the organisation's response to sexual misconduct. It is already considered a best practice within the UN family and we are sharing our experience through our ongoing leadership of the Chief Executive Board's Task Force on Eradicating Sexual Harassment with an important objective to deliver a UN-wide common understanding of what a victim-centred approach to sexual harassment means.

Early this year, the High Commissioner also issued a new Policy for Enterprise Risk Management, building on the previous Risk Management Policy issued in 2014 and our recent Risk Management 2.0 initiative. This new policy aligns roles and responsibilities for risk management with our new structures, codifies existing risk management practices, and reflects international best practice in risk management. This new policy, together with a new five-year strategy to replace the Risk Management 2.0 initiative which recently drew to a close, are some of the many elements colleagues are working on to enhance further risk maturity, embed risk management and strengthen the risk management culture of the organization.

As noted by the High Commissioner at the Executive Committee, we are reflecting deeply on racism and discrimination and considering how to improve policy, practices and culture in the organisation. To that effect, he established an Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Group and work has commenced on an independent race equity and equality review, which has just completed its inception phase. All the while, we are increasing dialogue in the organisation on racism and racial discrimination, including through a peer dialogue with senior managers and by equipping managers to lead dialogues on racism awareness with their teams.

Related to our quest to be an organization that is inclusive, respectful, and safe, where people have a sense of belonging, we have redoubled efforts to build a work environment that is harmonious and collaborative. We are taking steps to ensure managers intervene early to resolve workplace issues quickly and fairly and a review of the way in which headquarters entities work to address such issues, support impacted team members, and assist managers.

Madam Chair, Distinguished delegates,

We will discuss our programme budgets and funding for 2020 and 2021 in detail under item 8. Let me summarise with a couple of highlights. Thanks to you, we were able to raise a record level of income last year with some \$5.3 billion available for implementation. As in previous years, we benefitted from strong fundraising from the private sector, with individuals, corporations and foundations contributing over half a billion dollars to our budget, a record high. This includes some \$190 million raised from the private sector for emergencies and the largest in-kind donations ever received, including from business giants - GAP, Unilever and Inditex. So while the COVID-19 crisis has created economic hardship globally, we've also seen it generate increased solidarity and generosity, and our teams are working to transition new partnerships into long-term relationships.

We have taken a two-pronged approach to the 2021 programme, including a strong push from our end to mainstream COVID-19 needs within regular programming, particularly health, water and sanitation, shelter, camp coordination and management and protection sectors.

These mainstreamed needs are complemented by a COVID-19 supplementary budget, covering needs related to exceptional socioeconomic and protection impacts of COVID as well as a limited number of critical sector needs. In total, we are seeking some \$924 million for COVID-19 related activities, more than half of which have been built into our budget as originally approved by the Executive Committee.

Our overall fundraising activities this year are off to a good start, despite the somewhat morose global economic landscape, and we appreciate the response of some donors to date. We remain focussed however, as is always the case in the first months of the year, on ensuring timely and unearmarked contributions to allow operational continuity in the early months of our financial cycle. Unfortunately, in 2020, we received the lowest proportion of unearmarked and flexible funding received from government donors in the past decade, a trend not in line with the Grand Bargain.

And these challenges are compounded by everyday emergencies, I would be remiss in not mentioning the dramatic impact of yesterday's fire in camps in Bangladesh which has displaced tens of thousands and cost lives. We grieve those losses and are mobilising fast to address the immediate needs of impacted families. Thank you for anything you can do to support quickly.

In conclusion, we appreciate your continued and generous support. Millions of lives depend on it. We look forward to this committee's deliberations over the coming days and working closely with you in the weeks and months to come to meet the challenges and opportunities before us.

Thank you.