

**Introductory Remarks of Steven Corliss, Director for Change  
UNHCR's transformation (EC/81/SC/CRP.17)  
81<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee  
5 July 2021**

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to appear before the Standing Committee and to introduce Conference Room Paper 17 on UNHCR's transformation.

I'm joining you in my new capacity as Director for Change, after completing my assignment as UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh earlier this year. Some of you may recall that I worked very closely with this Committee as Director of Programme Support & Management from 2011 to 2017.

UNHCR's transformation process has made remarkable progress through the vision and hard work of my predecessor, Daisy Dell, and the guidance of the High Commissioner, Deputy High Commissioner, Assistant High Commissioners and Senior Management Committee, as well as through the efforts of colleagues around the world.

I'm privileged to be able to build upon this strong foundation. We are entering a period of consolidation and "fine tuning" in UNHCR's decentralization and regionalisation process, but some major elements remain on the agenda, most notably the Business Transformation Programme, which I will speak to in a moment.

Together with me today is Matthew Crentsil, who has joined us as Programme Director for the Business Transformation Programme, after serving as Representative in Venezuela. The High Commissioner has asked us – Representatives coming from two complex operations – to ensure that the ongoing changes respond to field needs, are well-coordinated and do not overwhelm our colleagues in the field who, in addition to delivering in extremely difficult environments, continue to face the added challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Conference Room Paper before you offers a broad view of UNHCR's transformation that touches on our engagement with the Global Compact on Refugees, important reforms to the United Nations development system, the High Commissioner's strategic investments in data and digitalization and our progress in improving the organization's capacities for risk management. We will continue to update the Committee on these aspects of transformation in other settings, so I will focus my statement on decentralization and regionalization and UNHCR's Business Transformation Programme.

When the Standing Committee last considered UNHCR's reforms as a full agenda item in September 2019, we were putting in motion the most ambitious structural transformations in our seventy-year history. Four months later, in January 2020, six new regional bureaux were operating in Amman, Bangkok, Dakar, Nairobi, Panama and Pretoria, with only the Europe Bureau remaining in Geneva.

The most significant global public health crisis in a century – the COVID-19 pandemic – followed a few weeks later. This presented UNHCR's new regionalized architecture with a dramatic early test, even as the new teams were still forming. Let me confirm from a field perspective what you have heard before.

Having the guidance and support of a strong and regional bureau in Bangkok – just one time zone away from Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar – was a huge asset in enabling my team to Stay and Deliver for the Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshis living in nearby communities.

The Conference Room Paper provides several concrete examples of how these more visible structural changes and strengthened regional capacities, combined with increased delegation to heads of sub-office, country representatives and regional bureau directors, have streamlined, speeded up and moved decision-making closer to the people we serve. These positive changes will continue and accelerate.

Building on this progress, the Headquarters divisions and entities are working to ensure the full alignment of their functions, structures, and capacities with UNHCR’s new architecture. We are looking again at what is done where and by whom – our roles, authorities and accountabilities – in order to ensure against any duplication, overlap or unnecessary feedback loops that could hinder us in realizing the full advantages of decentralization and regionalization.

Let me turn now to the Business Transformation Programme. As the Conference Room Paper explains, the Programme brings together six projects that will introduce new corporate systems touching upon all areas of our operations – from programme management and partnership, to financial, supply and human resources management to external relations and resource mobilization.

The Business Transformation Programme focuses on renewing and upgrading outdated back office systems with the goal of improving delivery on the frontlines, working more effectively with our partners, showing the results we achieve more clearly and being more accountable to you, while also better ensuring our Duty of Care to the team.

We are leveraging the full potential of new technology and industry best practices to reengineer, improve, simplify, and achieve greater efficiency in our internal processes. We are designing these systems to be interoperable, intuitive and to support mobile access, so that our agile, field-based teams can access data, updated reporting, and complete routine tasks on the go.

As the Deputy High Commissioner highlighted this morning, Compass, our new results-based management system, was the first component of the Business Transformation Programme to “go live” earlier this year. We are developing and will be rolling out the other new platforms in a phased and coordinated manner over the next two years – through mid-2023, according to our current planning.

Five years ago, the High Commissioner set out a very ambitious agenda for change. We have transformed UNHCR’s structures and are now working intensively to achieve very fundamental improvements in our processes and systems. But structures and systems will only take us so far.

Our success will ultimately depend upon us – the people of UNHCR – and the culture of integrity, trust, accountability, respect, and inclusion that we build together. While this is a more intangible dimension of UNHCR’s transformation, it is perhaps the most crucial to building an organization that is fit for the future and can deliver protection and assistance and secure solutions for the people we serve.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions that the Committee may have regarding UNHCR’s transformation, together with the Deputy High Commissioner and Mr. Crensil.