

Introductory remarks at the Standing Committee meeting of the
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (64th
meeting)

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Chapeau remarks covering IAOC, ODMS/Reform process/HR/Staff
security

Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

I would like to start these few remarks by thanking Ms. Mari Simonen, Chairperson of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee with whom I had the pleasure to meet for the first time earlier this morning, as well as her two colleagues Mr. Kandasamy and Mr. Verasak Liengsrirawat whose term came to an end in May, for their willingness to serve for another three years. I also wish to thank the Executive Committee for its support in this regard.

UNHCR greatly values the expert advice that the Committee provides to the High Commissioner and the Executive Committee in exercising their oversight responsibilities. UNHCR remains fully committed to good governance, qualitative oversight, effective audit functions and to the

establishment of a robust risk management system. While I was pleased to see numerous positive developments mentioned in the Committee's Report, I also took note of a number of areas where more robust efforts are needed. I want to assure the Committee that I will follow this very closely and look forward to meeting with the Committee in October for our 11th Session.

The reform process, which my colleague Anne-Marie Deutschlander will speak to later, has been one of the High Commissioner's top priorities since taking office in 2005. A key achievement has been the increase, by three-fold, of the amount of resources allocated to programme delivery in the field since 2006. This is combined with a significant reduction of the ratio of staff costs to overall expenditure from 41% in 2006 to just 21% by the end of 2014. Another commitment of the High Commissioner has been to limit UNHCR's footprint in Geneva mainly through the relocation of staff to out-posted Headquarters duty stations, Budapest and Copenhagen, both considered as optimal in terms of effectiveness and cost-efficiency. An important part of the structural reforms was the expansion of partnership which has brought UNHCR greater operational flexibility and technical expertise in delivering its mandate. Tested by multiple demands to respond to an increasing number of simultaneous emergencies, UNHCR has seen the benefits of its structural reform efforts, thanks to your strong support.

Today, as the High Commissioner's tenure draws to a close, I am pleased to say that the principles, measures and tools introduced over the past decade are now an integral part of UNHCR's daily management and operations.

As I said earlier, "mega"-emergency response has become a defining feature of UNHCR's work. This has led to the need for increased number of staff working in the field, often under very difficult and dangerous circumstances. As part of its contribution to the United Nations reforms on human resources management, UNHCR is active in several inter-agency working groups, including one on duty of care issues for UN personnel operating in high risk environments.

Mr. Chairman, there is one particular issue tabled for discussion at the UN level which I would like to draw to the attention of the Standing Committee. This is the Report of the International Civil Service Commission's review regarding the Compensation package for international staff members. UNHCR is concerned that the proposed cuts within the package, which predominantly negatively affect the entitlements granted to staff working in remote and hardship locations, will make it even more difficult than it is already for field-based organizations such as ours to attract qualified people to these duty stations. As I communicated to several key counterparts during my recent mission to New York, UNHCR would not want the need for

savings to be made at the expense of those who are on the front-line of humanitarian assistance. It is imperative that we find ways to mitigate the potentially very negative consequences for UNHCR staff, families and operations on whom millions depend for protection and assistance. We would be grateful for your support in bringing these concerns to the attention of key stakeholders in New York.

As you will hear shortly from the Director of the Division of Human Resource Management, Ms. Karen Farkas, UNHCR is working hard to move forward with the reforms that are necessary to build UNHCR's workforce for the future. The forthcoming 2016-2021 People Strategy which Karen will describe sets out a vision to meet evolving human resources challenges over the next five years and beyond. This strategy will support UNHCR's efforts to adapt and innovate our approach to human resources management so that we can better serve the people that depend on us and also take better care of our colleagues who are the heart and soul of this organization.

In many locations around the world, our staff and partners are exposed to an increasingly complex security environment as they seek to stay and deliver critical programmes for people in need. They are working near and in areas of ongoing conflict or unrest, and in the presence of armed and extremist groups, some of whom view humanitarian workers as legitimate targets. In Yemen, for example, UNHCR and other

humanitarian organizations are struggling to continue delivering life-saving assistance to internally displaced persons and refugees in the face of an ongoing military conflict and increased criminal attacks affecting the international community. Delivering assistance and protection safely in such environments requires nuanced and context-specific analysis of the environment and a strict approach to humanitarian principles to allow us to continue to deliver aid and protect people. We adjust security measures and procedures depending upon the situation and prioritize training our workforce, including UNHCR's important national and locally recruited staff. We cooperate closely with partners working to ensure our safety, particularly host governments, and we allocate adequate resources to enable us to live up to our commitment to stay and deliver.

Ensuring staff security, well-being, and professional development is key to our ability to operate and UNHCR will continue to treat this as one of our highest corporate priorities.

Thank you very much.