

Remarks for the 84th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
28-30 June 2022

Mister Chair,
Excellencies,

When we last met in March, I noted the large scale of displacement triggered by the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. Little did we know at the time that the close to three million people who had by then fled their homes in Ukraine were but a fraction of the displacement this conflict would cause.

The human consequences of the conflict are staggering with close to 15 million people forcibly displaced. Of those, 7.5 million people have fled to or through neighbouring countries, 2.5 million of them having since returned, some temporarily. Heavy fighting persists in parts of the country, leading to more displacement, and more devastation for families.

The response to this situation has been exemplary, and support has come from across the globe. Many have reaffirmed the principles and norms of protection, including access to asylum for people fleeing war, persecution or human rights violations: something my colleagues Gillian Triggs and newly arrived Director of the Division of International Protection Elizabeth Tan will address in the protection related items that form the core of this Standing Committee meeting.

But even supported by an exemplary international response, the scale up in activities required to respond to such massive displacement is significant. Neighbouring countries have mobilized significant resources, and people far and wide have opened their homes and provided support to fleeing refugees.

UNHCR is at the forefront of this response. We have provided direct assistance to fleeing families. And we have mobilised human and financial resources to enable the significant operational step-up this required.

We deployed 550 personnel through emergency deployments to the Ukraine situation, and expedited the assignment of a further 210 international personnel. We set up cash programmes in record time, with payments starting in Poland on March 11: two weeks after the commencement of hostilities and large-scale displacement. We also entered into twenty-five new partnership agreements and revised another eleven pre-existing agreements, with nineteen such partnerships established within the first 10 weeks so as to enable us to leverage the collective strength of the humanitarian system in this complex response.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

We are a relatively large organisation but, with the Ukraine and other conflicts pushing the numbers of forcibly displaced persons over 100 million for the first time since records started, we are stretched. And while the rapid redeployment of a few hundred personnel does not seem unmanageable for an organisation of our size, the impact of these redeployments is only seen when you consider specific operations: for example, with six of our colleagues previously working in Yemen now part of the Fast-Track response to the Ukraine situation. We are working to backfill those positions as rapidly as possible.

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Just as the response stretched our human resources, it also impacted our finances. Indeed, while we have received close to \$500 million in government contributions for the Ukraine situation, complementing an unprecedented similar amount from the private sector, our projections are that total government contributions to UNHCR this year will reach about the same level as last year. And the consequence of this is that the rest of the world's forcibly displaced and stateless people, some 85 million people, are going to suffer unless contributions towards other displacement crises are significantly scaled up.

This gap in funding is made all the more alarming as we see the global economic consequences of the Ukraine crisis, including spikes in inflation and increased cost of essential commodities, driving up both the aid needs of displaced populations and the cost of our operations.

We are early enough in the year to turn this around, but we need you. We are facing exceptional circumstances that require an exceptional call for support. Many of you are giving us assurances that funding provided for the Ukraine situation comes over and above existing commitments, which we welcome. But without additional commitments, we will soon be compelled to make difficult choices for operations in late 2022 and 2023 to ensure we meet both needs and our legal obligations to partners and personnel.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

The multiplicity of crises we are managing is both a risk and an opportunity. It is an opportunity as it allows, or forces us, to experiment and innovate. We have done this in the Ukraine response through a number of initiatives, including the creation of cash and finance hubs, both of which also bring UN reform and its push for efficiencies to life.

The Finance Hub enables the organisation to process an increasing number of financial transactions while maximising efficiency and quality. This approach allowed us to avoid creating dedicated local positions in each country, instead ensuring transactions are undertaken by a nimble specialised regional team.

The Cash Hub follows the same logic, supporting country operations in the Ukraine situation to establish Cash Based Intervention (CBI) programmes at short notice and in record time. This provides end to end management and oversight of all related CBI financial and risk management activities, providing financial reporting and governance and including the procurement of CBI financial services, their integration into current UNHCR cash systems, and the use of cutting-edge technologies ensuring traceability and accountability of UNHCR's cash support.

Another exciting initiative in our delivery of cash is a pilot project to test the provision of CBI using a digital wallet. This involves blockchain technology for disbursement of a digital US Dollar coin (fully backed by cash and government-issued obligations) allowing internally displaced people in Ukraine to access directly cash through the Ukrainian financial system. This will have a range of benefits to UNHCR and internally displaced persons, including real-time access to funds around the clock, with secure and guaranteed asset insurance and with virtually zero transaction costs.

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While the multiplicity of crises provides us with opportunities to learn and innovate, it is also creating unanticipated demands on our teams while we are collectively managing a complex, multifaceted and interdependent change process. The Business Transformation Programme, which I have mentioned in previous meetings, is a key component of UNHCR's transformation and a necessary complement to the decentralisation and regionalisation of operations. The programme is updating, upgrading and modernising the organisation's internal infrastructure of internal systems and processes.

We are making good progress with the Business Transformation Programme and expect the next new system, Workday – our Digital HR solution – will roll-out during the last quarter of this year.

So, as we simultaneously respond to multiple crises and at the same time, push for simplification and improvements through our change process, we are keeping the Business Transformation Programme's schedule under close and critical review. This includes considering the need for colleagues in key functions such as supply to contribute to emergency responses as well as the change management effort required for colleagues across the organisation to transition to new systems and processes. Our key consideration remains our commitment to ensuring that the roll-out of new systems is managed and timed within operational and business cycles to ensure they benefit operational delivery and generate the least possible disruption to operations and our colleagues.

I am happy to say that the task of managing these risks and opportunities is not left to the High Commissioner and Senior Executive Team alone. Rather, we benefit from input and support from our robust change and organisational setup, including overall strategic guidance and direction from the Transformation Governance Board and the Senior Management Committee, with the support of the Director for Change and the Transformation and Change Service. And the role of these various functions and entities is complemented by assurance provided by independent oversight entities, including but not limited to the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, or IAOC, which is suggesting a refresh of its terms of reference as part of a routine review which is mandated in its terms of reference themselves. I have just received a debrief on their most recent session with us and can say on behalf of the High Commissioner how much we continue to benefit from their advice in these challenging times.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Our change process continues to be accompanied by a cultural change dimension, including significant efforts to reinforce the integrity of our organisation and our integrity responses.

In this respect, I'm happy to announce that we have initiated a pilot of a Support Desk for Workplace Concerns to provide support and guidance to colleagues facing such concerns. This support desk gathers colleagues from across integrity-related functions, enabling us to leverage synergies and unity of action among them.

And it is clear that we have work left to continue to align our institutional setup, with our newly recruited Ombudsman and Mediator noting a need to strengthen the informal

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component of the conflict resolution process. And with abrasive behaviour a factor in some cases, we stand to benefit from further engagement through informal mechanisms to improve the quality of workplace interactions, a process that will benefit from the recently reinforced regional footprint of the Ombudsman and Mediator's office.

Our efforts to tackle workplace issues and ethical dilemmas in complex situations also benefits from the Ethics Office's stepped-up outreach to empower leaders and the entire workforce to use values and dialogue to address risks that can impact our work. And, regarding the Ethics Office whose mandate includes Protection Against Retaliation, I'll note that we are finalizing our review of the policy on Protection Against Retaliation, which we expect to be enacted in the coming weeks. This has allowed us to expand the scope of preventative measures to meet the specific needs of victims of sexual misconduct, even when they choose not to report the matter, and better leverage the investigative expertise of our Inspector General's Office in assessing claims of retaliation.

And finally, I must mention our substantial efforts - coordinated by the Office of our Senior Coordinator on Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse - to tackle sexual misconduct and support survivors. And when such abuse does occur, we are committed to ensuring survivors are heard and supported, in line with our policy on a victim-centred approach, including with support from our Victim Care Officer.

Our 2020-2022 Strategy and Action Plan on tackling Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment has informed a range of measures including placing a strong focus on integrating the prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment into emergency responses. As a result, UNHCR deployed dedicated PSEA capacity to five operations at the outset of the Ukraine refugee response to lead interagency coordination and establish harmonized and coherent prevention and response systems.

This forms part of our active engagement in interagency efforts, to ensure collective and harmonized action across the sector. To this end, we were closely engaged in the development of the IASC Vision and Strategy on Protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and have worked with both the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the UN's Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

I am again sharing our concern about rising needs across the globe and hope that you will show similar levels of solidarity to people displaced by crises beyond Ukraine.

But we are facing a significant financial gap for those other crises as support for the Ukraine crisis has so far largely come at the expense of other operations. And unless we receive additional funds for those other situations, we will have to make harsh decisions that will negative impact the rest of the world's forcibly displaced and stateless people. We don't want to do that, and I hope you will help us to avoid that.

We continue to work diligently to diversify sources of funding, as evidenced by the over \$1 billion we expect to receive from private sector sources this year alone. And we remain

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actively engaged in addressing systemic issues affecting humanitarian donorship, including through our engagement in the Grand Bargain 2.0. Despite this long-term systemic work, we have an immediate problem to solve.

We urgently need more funds to support our work. This will allow us to continue support to 100 million forcibly displaced and stateless persons, be they from Yemen, Iraq, South Sudan, Myanmar, Colombia, Syria or Ukraine. Failing this, we will soon be compelled to make difficult choices - decisions that will have life-changing consequences for some of the world's most vulnerable people.

Thank you for your constant support. We need you more now than ever before in this organization's 70-year history. The stakes couldn't be higher.