

Remarks for the 83rd Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
08 to 10 March 2022

Mister Chair,
Excellencies,

Recent events in Ukraine, and the displacement these have generated are a stark reminder of why the drafters of the United Nations Charter outlined, in the document's very first sentence, their determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.

This document, with its aim to maintain international peace and security, has seldom seemed as relevant as now. But it was itself born of conflict and bloodshed and its drafters had no illusions that it, alone, would lead to peace and security.

Instead, it was designed as a blueprint for collective action. As President Roosevelt noted after the Yalta Conference, a key milestone in the Charter's development: "Peace can endure only so long as humanity really insists upon it, and is willing to work for it- and sacrifice for it." History is proving him right and, 77 years later, we are clearly overdue to insist on peace.

The impact of our collective failures is clear to see. It is encapsulated in the suffering of ordinary Ukrainians, the millions displaced in the last eleven days, over a million within the country and 1.9 million to neighbouring countries. Faced with such consequences, I must echo the urgent call of the Secretary General and the High Commissioner that civilians and civilian infrastructure be protected and spared, and for humanitarian access to be granted for those of us delivering aid to people impacted by the military offensive in the country.

The High Commissioner was recently in Moldova, Poland, and Romania to support those countries in their response to displacement from Ukraine and oversee our own activities. The impressive nature of those countries' response is striking. This is a fluid and well-tailored response that will need to continue to adapt as the crisis, and population movements, evolve and the needs of affected populations become clearer.

But let us not forget that the dramatic consequences of conflict are also faced by millions of others in Ethiopia, Yemen, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, and other countries across the globe. We remain steadfast in our commitment to responding to displacement everywhere. The Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, and the heads of the Regional Bureaux, will update us on those many situations, the ever-growing humanitarian needs they have generated and our response.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

I highlighted, at last year's plenary session of the Executive Committee, the exceptional degree of agility, flexibility and adaptability required of UNHCR to respond to our world's instability. These are all attributes we are pursuing through our transformation and, if anything, recent events have reinforced our determination to continue to improve on our organisation's readiness to meet these daunting challenges.

We continue to pursue this agenda through the Business Transformation Programme, aimed to improve the delivery of protection, aid, and solutions for the people we serve. To support this goal, we are working to empower fully our teams on the ground, reduce bureaucracy and ensure we are using finite resources efficiently and effectively.

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This Programme complements the previous decentralisation and regionalisation phase, one which focussed on the superstructure of the organisation, now tackling arcane and complicated internal systems and processes. Some may see this as the plumbing and electrical wiring that completes a building's superstructure, but I'd rather liken it to the digital network that connects all parts of the edifice to a digital hub – providing coherence between all aspects of its management.

COMPASS, the first part of the programme to be rolled out, has changed our planning and, after seven decades of annual or biannual planning, 24 operations are now implementing multi-year strategies and a further 55 operations are initiating this in 2022. By 2024, UNHCR will implement multi-year strategies globally, an approach that will allow operations to plan strategically for the longer-term and better align with development partners.

Colleagues will be guided in this by the High Commissioner's revised Strategic Directions which will serve as the DNA that runs through strategies at all levels and drive our practical efforts on the ground.

The next Business Transformation Programme system to launch in a few months is Workday, our new cloud-based digital solution for Human Resources. Workday will introduce streamlined processes and a "mobile first" approach that will enable colleagues to handle tasks from mobile devices wherever they may be. With strong business intelligence tools and improved analytics, we will know our workforce better and increase our ability to put the right person in the right job at the right time. This will also strengthen our work toward achieving greater diversity and inclusion.

Mister Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

The Business Transformation Programme is a critical step towards simplification, modernisation, and efficiency – all objectives in line with the Secretary General's reform agenda and ongoing efforts across the system to drive business innovation.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having accelerated our collective move towards new working modalities, there is even greater scope to collaborate across agencies on global shared services, vertically integrating business processes, with a view to delivering more efficient and effective administrative support to UN operations.

To that system wide perspective, we continue to make progress in establishing UN Fleet, a joint initiative with the World Food Programme to provide end-to-end vehicle leasing services. This will be available to entities across the system and will provide a cost-effective way to access environmentally-friendly vehicles.

These efforts aim to support our colleagues and partners around the world and leverage efficiency gains to deliver more for the people we serve.

Toward these objectives, we recently refreshed our travel policy to simplify significantly administrative processes, reduce the organisation's carbon footprint and improve the care the organisation provides to our people.

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In order to meet modern day requirements of duty of care towards UNHCR's dedicated workforce, we recently issued a policy on managing occupational health and safety and issued a new policy on COVID-19 vaccinations and related safety measures, mandating COVID vaccines (where these are available) for new recruits, personnel in select occupational risk groups and official travel.

And finally, we are working to develop financial regulations for UNHCR given the current difficulty of applying ill-adapted UN regulations with outdated terminology and concepts to guide our financial management.

Many of you have engaged actively in discussions on the draft regulations which are included in the background documentation for item 4b. We appreciate your focus on this and hope this process has led you to the same conclusion as us — the regulations we currently use do not reflect how UNHCR, as a voluntarily funded agency, operates.

The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions' (ACABQ) conclusions on this matter is at odds with ours, as you will have seen from their report. We generally agree with the importance of system-wide solutions and have been active in areas in which we can improve delivery at the operational level. Financial regulations are at a much higher level however, and variance in these does not impede our ability to deliver as one as a system. We believe having our own regulations, like UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP and UN Women, would significantly improve our organization.

Furthermore, the vast majority of UN entities not defined as part of the UN Secretariat (like UNHCR) are already operating with their own sets of financial regulations and UNHCR remains the only – I repeat — the only — such entity with a budget of over US\$ 100 million still operating under the UN's financial regulations.

The ongoing transformation makes this the ideal time to review our financial regulations, ensuring these provide a solid foundation for the organisation's financial management (including rules and policies that build on financial regulations) and that all aspects of our organization are connected to maximise efficiency.

So, if you have reached the same conclusion on this, we ask you please reach out to your counterparts in capitals and in your New York missions for support in anticipation of the General Assembly's Fifth Committee's consideration of the matter on March 18.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Our Change process has and continues to be accompanied by a cultural change dimension: pushing for less hierarchy, more empowerment and trust, and a system in which authority is both relinquished and embraced, together with the accompanying accountability.

This is complemented by other cultural change efforts, including the substantial push to reinforce integrity across the organisation. We've discussed this in previous meetings and, in the interest of time, I will only mention a few highlights.

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First, we continue our push for strong formal systems dealing with misconduct. The High Commissioner's issuance of the annual report on his 'practice in disciplinary matters and cases of criminal behaviour' is a key tool in these efforts, communicating in unambiguous terms the organisation's commitment to ensuring all colleagues uphold the organisation's values with the highest standards of conduct.

The report is not issued merely to inform people, but also as a tool for managers to discuss these matters with their teams, to check on the strength and suitability of systems in place to prevent and respond to fraud, corruption and other forms of misconduct.

This push for strong formal systems is mirrored by a push for a more robust informal side of the administration of justice system, and to further invest in workplaces that are built on trust, transparency and integrity. This is centred around efforts for problematic workplace issues to be dealt with earlier and more effectively to improve dynamics across UNHCR workplaces and free up capacity in the formal system to focus on what it does best: respond and sanction misconduct.

These efforts build on a reinforced partnership between specialised headquarters entities and managers at all levels of the organisation to identify and respond to difficult workplace issues. They include a people management offering from the Division of Human Resources to strengthen related skills across the organisation, improve engagement within teams and help managers address workplace issues.

And last, but most certainly not least, I want to note the substantial progress we have made to combat racism and racial discrimination, and continue to build an inclusive, diverse and respectful organization. The Independent Review of Workplace Race Equality and Equity which was commissioned last year has, through a collaborative and consultative approach, resulted in a multi-year action plan that will inform and guide us to remove barriers, help us be the anti-racist organization to which we aspire and build a more inclusive organization for all colleagues and the people we serve. These efforts will build on those ongoing to achieve gender parity, as well as gender and disability inclusion.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

We will discuss our programme budgets and funding for 2021 and 2022 in detail under item 8 so I will limit myself to highlighting a couple of key issues now.

We were able to maintain a consistently high level of income last year with provisional year-end figures showing some \$5.1 billion available for implementation. And while this represents the second year in a row in which we had over US\$ 5 billion in funds available, we did have marginally fewer resources available to us in 2021 than in 2020, in spite of growing needs and renewed emergencies such as those seen in Ethiopia and Afghanistan.

Implementation remained strong, with an estimated 95 per cent of funds available used, which greatly benefitted from the key role Regional Bureaux played in identifying needs and optimising the allocation of resources to operations, together with a reinforced approach to resource allocation which has reduced the lag between the receipt of contributions and their availability to operations.

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We raised an unprecedented US\$ 617 million from the private sector, nearly half of this unearmarked. And I cannot overstate the critical role of unearmarked funding in allowing us to respond to unforeseen crises. While our teams are making herculean efforts to assess and articulate needs as soon as these arise, we are wholly reliant on our reserves and unearmarked funding in those crucial initial days of emergency responses (including now in Ukraine and the region). And with over 80 per cent of the funds received in 2021 earmarked, our ability to meet rapidly unforeseen needs remains severely challenged.

We issued a Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine situation last week, complementing the Humanitarian Flash Appeal put forward simultaneously by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Through these, the humanitarian community is seeking US\$ 1.7 billion to meet the short term needs of over 16 million people affected by the recent military offensive in the country.

I'll note that the addition of the Ukraine appeal brings our overall 2022 budget to US\$ 9.8 billion. And with the Ukraine appeal outlining short-term needs only, and possible unforeseen needs in other parts of the world, it appears likely that we will come back to you with a higher budget before year's end.

You will hear more about our response from the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Director of the Europe Bureau. In the meantime, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to you all for the financial support you have pledged in the response. We look forward to seeing those pledges matched quickly with funds.

We worry a lot about rising needs across the globe and hope you will show similar levels of solidarity to people displaced by other crises, including through pledges at the upcoming Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Yemen pledging conferences taking place later this month and the Ethiopia appeal just launched. The world's forcibly displaced and stateless count on us and we count on you.

Thank you.