

Opening Remarks for the 85th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
19 September 2022

Mister Chair,
Excellencies,

Before my brief opening remarks, I would like to extend my condolences, on behalf of UNHCR, to the people of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and to the family of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second. Her death marked the end of what has already been described as the Second Elizabethan Age. An era, spanning 70 years, defined by change, instability, turmoil around the world. Amidst this change, the Queen was a steady and reassuring presence. An anchor for many during a challenging period in our history.

And our recent history has been particularly challenging. Challenging the sense of peace and security we had taken for granted for so long right here in Europe. Where we had grown accustomed to peace, and to the idea that international armed conflict was a relic of the past. That displacement happened somewhere else. Until of course, it happened to more than 12 million Ukrainians, right on our doorstep. Challenging to the families, mothers, daughters, grandparents, separated from each other, uprooted from their homes. But generously received in our communities. Reminding us that peace is fragile, that conflict can happen at any time, anywhere.

A challenging year also to our perception that climate change is something that will happen sometime in the future. That we still have time to debate and adapt and prepare. That climate change is a problem for our children to address. And yet, today, Pakistan is under water. It is Pakistani children who are facing it. More than 33 million people impacted and more than 5.2 million in need. Houses washed away, hundreds of thousands of people displaced. Climate change is happening now. Extreme weather – floods and droughts, monsoons and fires – happen now. And displace people today.

But today is not a time to despair. It is a time to respond. It is a time for leadership. And it is precisely in moments like these, against this backdrop of enormous needs, that the call for UNHCR to serve is loudest. We are called to protect. In fact, we are mandated – we have an obligation – to protect the forcibly displaced, the stateless, and all the people UNHCR serves.

At the end of 2021, the total number of people UNHCR served stood at 94.7 million. This of course was before the war in Ukraine. By mid 2022, the total number of people forcibly displaced crossed the 100 million mark - more than 1% of the global population.

Responding to the massive scale of displacement requires leadership and resolve. It requires constantly rethinking and transforming the way we work. And of course, UNHCR does not work alone. Together with over 1,100 partners, we are responding to the growing needs across the globe. I was recently in Ukraine and Poland. The needs on the ground are acute, and will only become worse as winter approaches. We are grateful for the generous international response for Ukraine, which enabled us in turn to scale our own response very quickly. With our partners, we have mobilised human and financial resources in record time, deployed emergency personnel, set up innovative and efficient cash programmes, partnered with private sector and other actors to deliver in support of governments even more effectively. We continue to provide life-saving relief to displaced populations inside and outside

Ukraine. We are working harder than ever to reach them and deliver – often despite the lack of safe access.

Distinguished delegates,

We are not only working harder than ever, we are also working smarter than ever. We are seeking efficiency gains wherever we can. We are investing in change, transforming UNHCR. We are strengthening our oversight functions. Our financial discipline is tighter. We are reinvigorating our workplace culture. We are modernizing our systems, processes and policies and adapting them to the more than 550 dynamic environments in which we operate.

As you already know, the Business Transformation Programme (BTP) is one main vector of this institutional change. This ambitious programme leaves virtually no management stone unturned across UNHCR – from our Enterprise Resource Planning operations to how we manage relationships with our partners. These tools, which have been redesigned and optimized as cloud-based solutions, will continue to come online in the next few months – or in the case of Workday, the new HR system, in less than two weeks. Change is coming to UNHCR. Simplification is driving that change, and with that will come better delivery and efficiencies.

This has indeed been the case with COMPASS. 2022 marks the second year that UNHCR operations have used COMPASS, and the new approach to results-based management. 53 operations, 21 headquarters divisions and entities, and seven regional Bureaux developed multi-year plans for 2023. That is twice as many operations as in 2022. Following the initial time operations invested in preparing multi-year strategies, the planning process is simplified for the next years. Longer-term time-savings are evident. This new approach leads to better planning, and creates stronger linkages between UNHCR's work and those of partners and stakeholders at the country level. It also brings UNHCR planning in closer alignment with national and UN planning frameworks.

We are also transforming our supply chain and procurement business process with better forecasting, vendor management, and price negotiation. We are moving to leaner delivery mechanisms. We have improved the efficiency of our travel management. Together with the World Food Programme, we have established a joint venture and offered UN agencies light fleet as a service, and at country level we are sharing location-dependent services. We take every opportunity to test our new processes and ground them in the reality of our operations.

We recently established a Cash Hub in Geneva, to manage and oversee all financial transactions in the Ukraine situation. Centralizing that function has removed the burden of creating cash teams in each country, of identifying, training and deploying qualified personnel. A centralized Cash Hub will further enable operations to focus on refugee or people-facing activities, freeing up resources and time. It will also improve financial oversight and reporting. Again, simplification driving change. Simplification that works.

Distinguished delegates,

A successful transformation is not only measured in simpler processes, or in efficiency gains. Success is also measured in the engagement, diversity and commitment of UNHCR's workforce. As you will hear during item 4b on Human Resources, UNHCR is only as strong, only as efficient as its people. We are a diverse and dynamic organization, bound together by our values and our commitment to the people we

serve. We believe in nurturing our workforce's skills and capacities. We believe in providing the space for UNHCR teams to be innovative, to take risk-informed decisions on behalf of the people we serve, so that they don't have to make impossible choices or take unreasonable risks themselves.

Risk is inherent to the work of UNHCR, work that is often carried out in complex and unstable environments. Informed by our Risk Management 2025 strategy, UNHCR colleagues have the tools to identify more consistently and prevent problems before they occur. And to mitigate the impact of problems when they happen – after all, we know that risk can never be fully eliminated, especially in the locations where we operate. But that knowledge cannot paralyze our action. On the contrary, UNHCR colleagues are empowered and supported, across all levels of the organization and starting with senior management, not just to recognize risks but to act even with the awareness of risk. And, equally important, to know when not to act.

Accountability and integrity are the cornerstones on which the success of UNHCR's risk transformation rests. Without a framework for ethical decision-making, without the knowledge that misconduct can be safely reported, without clear rules for accountability and clear oversight procedures, the freedom to act too easily turns into the freedom to abuse, to harass, or to defraud. Whenever UNHCR colleagues witness or are victims of misconduct, it is critical that they know that they can safely and confidentially report that misconduct without fear of retaliation – through a variety of channels like the Speak Up hotline, or the newly established Support Desk that is managed by our Ethics Office. Colleagues need to know that when they do speak up, their grievances will be heard, and that we will act.

While we push for greater accountability internally, we also continue to collaborate closely with the UN Board of Auditors and welcome their recommendations and guidance to improve UNHCR's control framework and the effectiveness of the organization, especially in light of the multifaceted transformation underway. Following its examination of financial statements prepared for the year, the Board concluded that these presented fairly, in all material respects, UNHCR's financial position and its financial performance and cash flows for the year. We value the insights provided by the Board of Auditors, and will continue to work to address its recommendations in a timely manner.

Similarly, we rely on the insights and recommendations provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to further enhance our governance and risk-management processes. We are grateful to have the Under-Secretary General for OIOS with us to present its report later today. Her presence is a testament to the positive engagement between our organizations.

Distinguished Delegates,

Before closing, let me turn briefly to funding. As presented to the ACABQ recently, the consolidated budgetary requirements for 2023 amount to \$10.2 billion. This is compared to \$10.5 billion for the current programme budget for 2022. UNHCR is grateful for the \$4.6 billion in contributions received in 2021, and the high level of support UNHCR's operations are receiving this year. We are on track to match that level of financial contributions for 2022, and we appreciate the confidence donors place in the organisation.

Despite this strong support, we continue to see a growing gap between the needs identified and the resources received. 44 per cent of budgeted needs for 2021 were unmet. This has been a recurrent issue for years and is now compounded by a widening funding gap for all operations other than the Ukraine situation. Donor earmarking has shifted and major operations, including Uganda, the Democratic

Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Colombia face huge unmet needs. This has a direct and dramatic impact on the people UNHCR serves, with dire protection consequences. Children unable to go to school. Refugees losing access to shelter and health services. Cash assistance, IDP emergency shelter kits, even legal documentation – all critical services that would have to be stopped, or dramatically scaled back. We would be forced to make impossible choices. We cannot afford to make these choices. The people we serve can't afford for us to make these choices.

UNHCR also remains concerned at the decreasing levels of the UN regular budget contribution over time. This contribution, which is \$42.2 million for 2023, is welcome but proportionately low in support of UNHCR's management and administrative costs. A decade ago the UN regular budget contribution represented 37 per cent of our management and administrative costs. In 2023 it is projected to represent only 22 per cent. This may not seem critical when viewed against a \$10.2 billion budget, but every centime counts as we aim to raise the funds necessary to meet compelling needs.

Excellencies,

I will close by recognizing the extraordinary commitment of the UNHCR team and partners to making a positive impact in the lives of forcibly displaced, returnee, and stateless people. They work in the face of substantial hardship, often at great personal risk, and we are humbled every day by their dedication to the people we serve.

I thank you for your interest, attention and most importantly, for your steadfast support for the work of UNHCR. We depend on it in these challenging times.