

Statement to the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Introductory Remarks by Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner

Room XIX, Palais des Nations

13 October 2022

Mr. Chair,  
High Commissioner,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates

Let me start by thanking you for the substantive debate we have had thus far in this 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Executive Committee. Your statements speak to your engagement on behalf of the people we serve.

More than 100 million.

In Ukraine and in Pakistan, but also away from the spotlight, in Chad and Iraq.

With no end in sight to their plight.

100 million people who want to go home, but remain in exile.

On their behalf, thank you for the trust you place in us. Thank you for your support to UNHCR as we rise to the challenge of meeting enormous, enormous humanitarian needs.

As you know, the humanitarian landscape in which UNHCR operates is dynamic. It is complex and interconnected. As you heard from the High Commissioner, Covid.. climate... conflict... and costs of living... are all pushing people from their homes.

Forced displacement is accelerated by climate change. Forced displacement is compounded by political and economic uncertainty. By food insecurity. We are not blind to the environment around us. We know that the financial outlook for 2023 is sobering. We can feel the economic headwinds – inflation, cost of living, energy prices. But it is precisely for times like these that UNHCR exists. Against this backdrop of political and economic instability, UNHCR is called to protect. We are mandated to protect refugees and others forced from their homes. And along with our obligation to protect, we have a responsibility to do so efficiently. Transparently. By working with you and with more than 1,100 partners on the ground to maximize our collective impact. To improve the lives of the people we serve.

And that can be done in very real and concrete ways. In Ukraine, thanks to your generous support, we were able to scale our response very quickly after the beginning of the war. I was there just recently. I saw how with our partners, we 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.

When you support us, classrooms welcome refugee children in Moldova. When you support us, rents are paid in Lebanon. Health clinics open their doors to host communities and refugees alike in Uganda.

Distinguished delegates,

With your support, we provide life-saving aid to displaced populations wherever they are. Being closer to where the needs are – you will recall UNHCR’s decentralization and regionalization a few years ago – has enabled us to deliver more effectively. During COVID, being closer to refugees meant UNHCR could stay and deliver. And as you will hear from my colleagues under this agenda item, we haven’t rested since.

We are constantly seeking ways to deliver more efficiently. Seeking to make UNHCR a leaner organization. A greener organization, one with a lighter carbon footprint. We are investing in change, transforming UNHCR. Strengthening our oversight functions. Tightening our financial discipline. Reinvigorating our workplace culture and modernizing our systems.

The Business Transformation Programme is one main vector of this institutional change. This ambitious programme leaves virtually no management stone unturned across UNHCR – from resource planning and partner management, to human resources, or supply management. These processes have been redesigned, and optimized as part of UNHCR’s digital transformation. Our cloud-based solutions will come online over the next year.

Or in the case of Workday, our new HR system, it came on line just this week. Workday is an industry-leading platform. It will strengthen evidence-based decision-making across UNHCR human resources – providing better data insights about our workforce, identifying trends and gaps in our talent management, and ultimately bringing global best practices to UNHCR. And along with the upgrade in software, we also reviewed our policies, simplifying our rules, eliminating red-tape, and leveraging Workday’s features to reduce complexity wherever possible. Simplification is driving that change, and with that will come better delivery and efficiencies.

This has also been the case with COMPASS. 2022 marks the second year that UNHCR operations have used COMPASS, and the new approach to results-based management. Twice as many operations developed multi-year plans for 2023 than did in 2022. This leads to simpler and 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. Frontloading the strategic planning also means that after the first year, the planning process for subsequent years is simplified. Longer-term time-savings are evident. Simple, effective and efficient.

We are 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, driving change across the UN. Together with the World Food Programme, we have established a joint venture and offered UN agencies fleet leasing as a service. Just last week UNICEF and UNFPA signed agreements with us to use this innovative fleet management service, with more expressing interest. In fact we have already received inquiries from over 20 countries for fleet leasing. Your support makes this innovation and collaboration possible.

We take every opportunity to test our new processes and ground them in the reality of our operations.

We established a finance hub within weeks of the onset of the Ukraine emergency, enabling the organization to process large volumes of financial transactions quickly and efficiently without compromising quality. Centralizing the finance function removed the burden of creating dedicated teams in each country, of identifying, training and deploying qualified personnel. Instead these transactions were undertaken by a nimble specialized team – consolidating oversight and ensuring better compliance with financial standards.

Again, simplification driving change. Simplification that works.

Distinguished delegates,

Our 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. 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. A better employee experience for each colleague means that they in turn can provide the best care for people forced to flee. A robust, modernized and tailored people function gives our workforce the support they need to grow in even the most challenging environments.

UNHCR prides itself on being able to operate in complex and unstable environments. That of course entails taking risks. Risk is inherent to the work of UNHCR. Informed by our Risk Management 2025 strategy, UNHCR colleagues have the tools to identify 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. 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. Colleagues need to know that when they do speak up, their grievances will be heard, and that we will act. The Inspector General will speak to independent oversight of UNHCR in more detail.

And throughout our transformation, and contributing to it, we continue to learn. Not least through independent and thorough evaluations – whether these focus on regions, on specific countries, or on global strategic priorities, as the Report on Evaluation outlines. And to strengthen our Evaluation capacity and overall governance, the High Commissioner just issued a revised evaluation policy, on which we briefed you on the margins of the last Standing Committee. You’ll hear further from the Head of the Evaluation Office separately on this as well.

Before closing, one final word, Mr. Chair, on our budget.

It would be appropriate here to acknowledge the recent proposal regarding UNHCR’s budgetary process, and thank the delegations for their constructive engagement. We thank the delegations, and in particular the good offices of the Rapporteur, under your leadership Mr. Chair, for reaching agreement on maintaining consensus.

I will not repeat what we presented to you at the ACABQ and more recently during the Standing Committee. Just to highlight that UNHCR’s budget for 2023 is the largest ever - \$10.2 billion – because humanitarian needs are larger than ever. But UNHCR’s budget for next year is also smaller than the current

budget of \$10.7 billion – another indication that we are always looking for efficiency gains, to use every dollar received as productively as possible.

Yet, as the High Commissioner underscored strongly on Monday, the gap between needs identified and the resources received remains wide. We are on track to receive approximately \$5.6 billion this year – for which we are very grateful. However, this means we are only half funded. Or, expressed differently, that only 50% of the budgeted needs for 2022 were met. Combined with donor earmarking, this has a direct and dramatic impact on the people UNHCR serves, particularly in places like Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, or Ethiopia. Countries all notable for their generous hosting of refugees. If UNHCR cannot bridge the funding shortfall – estimated at \$700 million for our most underfunded operations – we will be forced to choose between life-saving priorities. 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.

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 again for your interest, attention and for your steadfast support for the work of UNHCR. The people we serve depend on it.