

**Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
88th Standing Committee meeting**

**Statement by Catty Bennet Sattler
Director, Division of Human Resources**

**Agenda Item: 4 (b) Human resources, including staff welfare
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Madam Chair, Excellencies,

Around the world, we have continued to see the number of forcibly displaced persons rise – reaching 110 million this summer. As this global trend shows no sign of abating, it has become abundantly clear that we will need all hands on deck across the humanitarian sector to address the serious challenges ahead.

No matter the complexity and urgency we face, the UNHCR workforce continues to find ways to respond to this growing humanitarian need. From the most remote field locations to the hallways of our headquarters right here in Geneva, **our colleagues show up – every day – for the forcibly displaced people who count on them.**

They do so with resilience, courage and conviction, even when impacted by threats or traumatic experiences. We have seen several such security situations play out around us in the past year, including in Sudan, where we had to evacuate around 70 colleagues and their families earlier this year.

In February, we lost **Myra, Faruk, Tamer and Hassan**, when Türkiye and Syria were severely impacted by the devastating earthquakes. They dedicated their lives in service of others, and their loss is a loss not only for UNHCR, but for the humanitarian community as a whole.

[PAUSE]

Madam Chair, Excellencies, our mission to support a rapidly increasing number of people forcibly displaced requires us to fully use our resources and optimize our processes – so that our organization can deliver as efficiently as possible.

To this end, the Division of Human Resources has marked several major milestones on the transformation journey we embarked upon nearly five years ago, centered around the key premises of **People, Partnership and Technology**.

Please allow me to take you back to 2019, when we started our journey to transform our HR function. Back then, DHR was not seen as a strong partner to the organization. We were taking

too long to get people on the ground, people management wasn't prioritized, and we had outdated HR technology systems.

Our work to transform DHR has been intensive since then, including introducing HR partners in all seven regions, stronger capacity for staff health and wellbeing, and new capabilities in workforce planning, people analytics, learning and new – best in class – HR technology.

In October 2022, after extensive testing and preparation, we could finally leave our old, outdated HR system behind and go live with **Workday**, which offers a much more user-friendly system for all things HR: from payroll, recruitment and strategic workforce planning to personnel administration, learning and performance management.

This digital transformation, however, goes far beyond these everyday transactions.

Reviewing our processes against the Workday standard based on global best practices has allowed us to simplify and streamline 16 HR policies and over 200 processes. We introduced new ways of promoting good people management through Evolve, a new performance management approach with a greater emphasis on development and continuous feedback. And we now also have access to an incredible richness of data about our workforce, processes and opportunities for further efficiency gains. While we still have work to do on our transformation, it is inspiring to hear feedback from other organizations about the magnitude of our change, which is more significant than others across the industry and certainly the UN system.

Technology has been a far greater accelerator than I could have imagined for our HR teams, who have adopted new ways of working and mindsets as part of the process. **

As is the case with any change of this magnitude, the transition to Workday – and everything that accompanied that change – has taken a lot of energy and effort, with some people catching on early to these new ways of working, and others needing more time to adapt.

The UN system and its administrative processes are unique, and aligning existing external standards with deeply engrained methodologies took time and effort – but it has certainly been worth it. I'm pleased to say that as of today, we have successfully conducted over 3 million HR transactions within Workday, and the majority of our colleagues are seeing the benefit of this change. As several other crucial parts of the Business Transformation Programme are due to go live this fall, it is encouraging to see the stability that Workday has brought to our HR function.

But this would not have been possible without the dedicated effort of our global HR community, who worked tirelessly to roll out Workday on time and within budget and who continue to drive

this change. Because of their support, we are moving forward in our quest to serve better, react faster, and create an environment where everyone is included. I am very grateful to everyone in our HR Community for making this happen.

The real-time data available in Workday is showing us where we are doing well and which areas we can focus on for improvement.

You will see that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are key areas of investment and development for our organization, and we continue to make steady progress towards our gender and geographic diversity goals.

We have over 160 nationalities among our colleagues, and we welcome different religious and cultural backgrounds; family compositions, genders and ages; educational backgrounds; physical ability, and work and life experiences. As far as possible, we are inclusive to their needs and in turn benefit enormously from the wealth of diversity in the perspective and experience of our workforce. It is what makes our organization better able to respond to the needs of a highly diverse population of displaced people.

Strengthened by the robust framework provided by our existing **Race Equality and Equity Action Plan**, our **Action Plan on Disability Inclusion**, and our revised **Recruitment and Assignments Policy**, we have marked significant progress towards Equity and Inclusion.

We have more women in leadership than ever before, improved geographical consideration and representation in our recruitment, appointment and conversion processes, and more people are able to benefit from workplace accommodation. Our new **Parental Leave Policy** also significantly expanded our definition of what it means to be a parent and offers expanded leave entitlements following the birth or adoption of a child, including through surrogacy.

Our workforce composition, however, will look different next year.

As the Deputy High Commissioner highlighted in her opening remarks, UNHCR is undertaking a proactive review of our structures and workforce needs, to remain agile and efficient in a changing humanitarian landscape. As we have already made great strides in implementing supporting technology and moving our workforce closer to the communities we serve, this comprehensive effort is homing in on where we can further streamline positions and programs to ensure we have more for refugees in a period of globally declining humanitarian funding.

From a people point of view, it will inevitably entail that some colleagues may lose their jobs, see their everyday work change, or need to rotate prematurely. While this is not what we would

like to see for our dedicated, hardworking colleagues, we are making all efforts to support them, through career transition services and other targeted actions. We remain in close collaboration with our staff welfare services and the ombudsperson, realizing the impact this exercise will have on the people who are directly affected, as well as the teams who are asked to do more with fewer resources.

Organizationally, it will be turbulent, but this is not new for UNHCR: we are used to expanding and reducing our footprint as the humanitarian landscape changes, and I am confident we will emerge stronger from this exercise.

[PAUSE]

[Madam Chair, Excellencies](#), when I sat before you four years ago with ambitious plans of transformation, I was formulating my ideas based on an unknown future. Looking back at how much the environment we work in has changed, it is clear to see that this transformation couldn't have been more timely.

Accelerating change and rising complexities within our overall mandate means we can't sit back and let where we are now in our transformation become the status quo. We must continue to review how to keep up with what is yet to come for our key focus areas of People, Partnership and Technology.

We owe it to our colleagues globally, who are on the ground working every day, to offer them the best tools and support we can. Ensuring that we have an agile, dynamic and diverse workforce that we can deploy, scale up, and upskill more readily in emergencies will ultimately make DHR a stronger partner to our operations on the ground.

Every year, I take the opportunity of having this platform and audience to emphasize how much UNHCR owes our ability to carry out our work to **OUR PEOPLE**.

Whether working hands-on in deep-field situations or providing vital operational support behind the scenes. Whether working in registration, protection, resettlement, logistics, communication or HR, or as drivers, legal advisors, technical coordinators or counselors: every part of our organization plays a vital role in responding to a refugee situation that continues to grow and become more complex.

People are UNHCR. We will continue to give our all to our mandate. And the Division of Human Resources will continue to innovate, care and support for the people that make our work possible.

Thank you.