

Remarks for the 91st Standing Committee meeting  
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme  
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner  
12 & 13 September 2024

Madam Chair,  
Excellencies,

It is a privilege to be here with you today. Every time we meet in this Committee, we reaffirm what brings us together; our common efforts to protect and find solutions for people forced to flee and stateless persons. Our work is more critical today than ever.

The numbers speak for themselves. Over 120 million people forcibly displaced. Long standing conflicts and new violence force more and more people to move. Their number has gone up every year over the last twelve years. Millions of families torn apart, their lives forever affected by loss – of their homes and their livelihoods. Their futures changed forever. And current trends increasingly tell us that their future will be one of prolonged displacement, with solutions seemingly out of reach.

This year alone, UNHCR has responded to 35 emergencies, of which 18 were new. Many countries are addressing multiple emergencies simultaneously. Like in Sudan, where over 10 million people have been forced to flee their homes since the start of the conflict, and 2.2 million of them have fled to neighbouring countries. People forced to contend with violence, and now faced with widespread flooding or cholera outbreaks. In South Sudan and Chad, countries I visited earlier this year, our teams are now reporting an increase of malaria cases in refugee sites, triggered by the rainy season. This comes on top of alarming levels of malnutrition, and outbreaks of measles and other acute illnesses.

The picture is just as bleak in Myanmar, where increasing violence now has uprooted 3.3 million people.

And the same is true in Ukraine. Where the laws of war are being trampled every day. Where populations face a third winter of uncertainty.

In all these countries, and many more, UNHCR and our partners are providing emergency aid to affected civilians. Thanks to your support, we are there every day, monitoring borders, advocating for access, providing counselling, filling registration forms, providing cash, rehabilitating shelters, welcoming students to classrooms – in a way, helping people rediscover a sense of safety and stability. While we do not lose hope and must renew our calls for peace and for an end to these conflicts, we continue to protect, respond, include, empower, and solve in 136 countries around the world.

Distinguished delegates,

Over the past eight years, UNHCR has gone through a massive transformation and modernization process. We decentralized operations and brought decision-making closer to operations, becoming more agile and faster in our responses. We embedded innovation, data, and technology into our processes. While we continue to drive change and search for efficiencies, the organization is now better equipped to tackle unprecedented global displacement.

UNHCR's proposed programme budget for 2025 reflects the needs of people forced to flee and stateless persons. The budgetary requirements stand at some \$10.2 billion, which is a decrease compared to the current budget, of nearly \$10.8 billion, as of end of July. This decrease is not due to falling needs, but it reflects our ongoing efforts to streamline.

The budget also speaks to our commitment to finding solutions to displacement. In line with the Global Compact on Refugees, we are changing the way we program and deliver. We are driving forward sustainable solutions, strengthening partnerships, and expanding our impact. We want to maximize self-reliance and reduce dependency on humanitarian aid, and increase investments in emergency response, protection, social economic integration, and solutions. This is achieved through a whole-of-society approach, engaging development actors to support sustainable service delivery and partnering with the private sector to create employment opportunities for those forced to flee. This approach is not new, it is already used in countries like Costa Rica, Kenya and Mauritania – to name just a few. The High Commissioner will speak more about this operational shift during next month's Executive Committee meeting.

Distinguished delegates,  
Madame Chair,

While we continue to embrace technology and new ways of working, we remain committed to strengthening the culture of efficiency within the organization. Through our Business Transformation Programme, we have eliminated inefficient paper-based processes, becoming one of the first agencies in the United Nations to move entirely to the cloud. We are now focused on optimizing these new systems, to gain even more from our investments. In addition, we are continuously looking for ways to standardize and centralize certain processes to cut costs. For example, we continue to review further areas to centralize like payments, banking, travel, and invoices to generate further savings.

Just last month, our innovative efforts to use financial technology to improve how we manage our treasury functions were recognized with the 2024 Treasury Excellence Award for Technology Transformation. By using advanced digital platforms, we have made our cash-based programs more efficient and set a new standard in the humanitarian sector. All with the objective of better serving those who rely on us.

We are also investing in greening our operations, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from our buildings, fleet, and travel. We are on track to reach a 30 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. In collaboration with other UN agencies, we are finding more opportunities to cut needless costs through joint procurement processes. And, we are working closely with the private sector, to learn from their experiences in achieving efficiencies.

Looking ahead, to meet present and future challenges, UNHCR is developing a comprehensive efficiency agenda, supported by a new Design and Development Service, which is replacing the one focused on Transformation and Change. This new Service will contribute to UNHCR's management vision, and focus on optimizing the architecture, processes, and systems that support our operations. The Service will advise the organization on how to best achieve our strategic priorities, as outlined in the Global Compact.

Distinguished delegates,

To guide us in becoming a better, leaner and even more agile organization, we have benefitted from the findings shared through audit recommendations and evaluations. You will recall that we commissioned an independent evaluation of UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization reform. This evaluation looked at how our new organizational design and ways of working have affected our ability to meet the growing needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. The final report will be shared before the Executive Committee in October, and we look forward to discussing the findings with you then.

Independent oversight is another critical function, and UNHCR has improved in the implementation of outstanding audit recommendations. You will hear more about this in the session on key audit findings from the 2023 cycle. We are also grateful to the Board of Auditors for its ongoing advice. Their recommendations help improve the effectiveness of UNHCR. An advance copy of the Board of Auditors Report was shared with you before this meeting, and I am pleased to say that UNHCR has accepted all of the recommendations, and we are actively working to address them in a timely manner. Following the Board of Auditors examination of our financial statements prepared for 2023, 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 their insights and note that this was the first reporting period using the new Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

Distinguished delegates,

Let me now turn to UNHCR's funding situation, which looks slightly more optimistic compared to our last meeting in July. As of last month, UNHCR received \$ 4.151 billion in funding, and I thank all donors who increased their contributions and all of you who continue to support us during these challenging times, even as you face many other demands on your national budgets. I want to single out the United States for its particularly generous support this year and Germany, the European Union and Japan which have consistently been among our largest donors. I must also acknowledge the massive contribution made by Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands through their generous unearmarked funds. Unearmarked support means we can deploy immediately in emergencies and deliver protection in overlooked crises. And I want to underline the essential role of host countries, in particular those which include refugees in their local economies and services. Your support is crucially important.

UNHCR continues its efforts to broaden the donor base by engaging new and emerging donors and exploring innovative ways, including climate financing, innovative financing and Islamic philanthropy. Despite these efforts though, the gap between our needs-based budget and funds available, is high. And the outlook for 2025 and beyond remains very uncertain.

Madame Chair,  
Distinguished delegates,

Before closing, I want to recognize our incredibly dedicated workforce and the personnel of our over 1,200 partners, most of them are local actors. They are at the heart of our mission. Our colleagues' commitment is reflected in the results of internal surveys, which consistently highlight the diversity and dedication of our workforce. Today, we have nearly 19,800 colleagues working across 588 locations, and we are actively taking steps to diversify our workforce even further.

In April of this year, we launched UNHCR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Framework for 2024-2026, which is available on our website. The framework is a significant step forward, setting clear strategic directions to include diversity, equity and inclusion in every aspect of our work. I am also pleased to announce that we have achieved gender parity at all levels of our international workforce as of end of August. I am very proud of this. And we are strengthening our efforts further along with the rest of the UN system with the development of a new Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, promoting equal opportunities for women in leadership, strengthening gender-sensitive policies, and promoting an inclusive workplace culture that empowers all colleagues.

Our continued commitment to personnel welfare is crucial, especially following last year's realignment. This exercise had significant global impact, affecting individuals, teams, managers, and many that were indirectly affected as well. We continue our extensive efforts to support affected colleagues.

Particularly during times of transition, it is important to maintain a culture of accountability, trust and transparency and have strong systems for reporting possible misconduct and abuse. Fortunately, as you know from past meetings of this Committee, we have considerably strengthened these formal and informal systems. As a result, we have seen a rise in both formal and informal complaints, which shows growing awareness and trust in our integrity systems. We will talk more about this during the session on integrity and risk management later in this agenda.

Distinguished delegates,

In closing, let me turn to the 120 million refugees and other displaced people with whom we work. Ultimately, they are the reason we remain steadfast in our commitment to transform our organization and to continue to look for the efficiencies to deliver more for them. And this is where we call on your support. Because the people we serve are not just recipients of aid. If they are included and they are given the chance, they have the potential to contribute significantly to the societies that host them.

We see this in our communities, and we saw this during the Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer. I was fortunate to be in Paris and witness the refugee athletes' incredible achievements. It was thrilling to see Cindy Ngamba win the first-ever medal for the Refugee Olympic Team in boxing and see Zakia Khudadadi and Guillaume Junior Atangana of the Refugee Paralympic Team win bronze medals in taekwondo and athletics. Their achievements show the courage, hope and aspiration of people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes. And as Zakia said, "This medal is for all the refugees in the world."

And this summer UNHCR received two sports related awards. First, the Olympic Laurel given to the High Commissioner during the Opening of the Games, for the crucial role sport can play in the inclusion, belonging and physical and mental well-being of refugees. And last week I had the honour to receive the Fair Play for Peace Award on behalf of UNHCR, in recognition of our work to highlight the impact of sport in spreading the positive values of peace and solidarity around the world.

Thank you for your continued support and the trust you place in us. Onward.