

Remarks for the 91st Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Agenda item 3(c) – Oral Update on Integrity
12-13 September 2024

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

You just heard the Director of Human Resources speak about the ongoing efforts to support our workforce affected by the realignment exercise. With an increasing number of people forced to flee and shrinking resources available, many colleagues are anxious and worried about the future. In these challenging times, the work of our integrity entities is more important than ever. Our personnel must continue to have trust in our informal and formal systems to resolve workplace related conflicts. And colleagues must feel they are being heard and action is taken based on their reports of what is happening in the workplace.

The document shared as background to this session, provides an update of the activities implemented by UNHCR's integrity family and related entities – Enterprise Risk Management Service, Ethics Office, the Ombudsman and Mediator, and the Office of the Principal Advisor on Protection from Sexual Misconduct. I will not repeat what is in the document, but I want to highlight a few points for your attention.

We continue to invest in promoting a speak up culture and informal conflict resolution. In May this year, UNHCR launched the “Resolution is more than a solution” mediation campaign. It encourages colleagues to speak within teams and operations and use mediation as an “informal-first approach.”

The Ethics Office also plays an important role in supporting UNHCR's speak-up culture and mitigating escalation of conflicts in the workplace. Last year, the Office received nearly 60 requests from personnel for support with protection against retaliation. This is a 28 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Out of these requests, 16 progressed to formal cases of protection against retaliation, and all the initial determinations were upheld by the Ethics Panel of the United Nations.

You will see an increase in complaints and caseloads received by all of these offices in the past year. We take this as an encouraging sign that there is more awareness about the key role these entities play in fostering a speak up culture within the organization and trust in the integrity systems that we have invested in for many years. And we continue to reinforce the organization's culture of integrity and accountability, as demonstrated by an increasing number of reports of sexual misconduct. We continue to believe that there is still underreporting across the system.

To strengthen this work, a new UNHCR Policy on Addressing Sexual Misconduct was adopted this year to codify and clearly outline individual and collective responsibilities and accountabilities in the fight against sexual misconduct. This policy builds on and reinforces our existing policy on a victim-centred approach in addressing sexual misconduct and ensures that all our work is guided by the needs and wishes of survivors. In the last four years, UNHCR has

established a specialized victim care team, launched the innovative NotOnlyMe platform, and shared good practices with other agencies across the system. Significant investment has gone into prevention efforts through enhanced learning initiatives for both UNHCR and partner personnel to better identify, prevent, and respond to sexual misconduct. This includes sensitizing colleagues to the role organizational and workplace culture can play in giving rise to this form of misconduct.

Another area in which we continue to invest is identifying, mitigating, and addressing integrity risks. This organization-wide effort, it is supported by our risk management network. And I am pleased that risk management was highlighted as an area of strength for the organization in the last report of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network. Over this past year, we have also made considerable progress in defining our risk appetite, we talked a little about yesterday and this morning, in various operational areas, with strong messaging on the need to manage proactively integrity risks and maintain ethical standards.

In the constantly changing and often difficult contexts in which UNHCR operates, integrity and accountability remains a key priority. This goes beyond identifying and responding to misconduct in all its forms. It is also about fostering a cultural shift and embracing new ways of working among both our colleagues and partner personnel. And for colleagues in managerial positions to lead by example and foster respectful and open communication especially during difficult times like we are facing today. This is essential for a healthy and safe workplace, free from abuse, discrimination and harm.

Distinguished delegates,

I am pleased to be joined on the podium by the Acting Director of the Ethics Office (who has returned from retirement to cover maternity leave for the Director), the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Chief Risk Officer and the Principal Advisor on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. They have deep experience in their respective fields and together they drive our efforts to further strengthen UNHCR's organizational culture of respect, integrity and accountability.

I am proud of the work we continue to do – together – to uphold the highest ethical standards and stay true to our mission.

Thank you.