

**Executive Committee of the  
High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Standing Committee**

**Ninety-first meeting**

**12-13 September 2024**

Held at Palais des Nations, Geneva

**Summary record\*, Friday, 13 September 2024, at 10 a.m.**

*Chairperson: Amanda Gorely* .....(Australia)

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*Ms. Amanda Gorely took the chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.06 a.m.*

**3. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources (resumed)**

**(iii) Resumed discussion on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on internal audit in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/AC.96/75/7).**

1. The representative of **the Russian Federation** asked whether the decentralization and regionalization process of UNHCR had impacted the quality of the audit system. He wished to know if there were any resulting duplication of authority at the various levels of the three lines of defence (3LoD) model, particularly in the field, or if the burden on the Office of Internal Oversight Services had increased because of the delegation of authority from the headquarters to the field missions.

2. Noting the findings of UNHCR on unreliable and poor-quality data used by field missions to report on results, he requested that UNHCR present measures it would take to eliminate the problem. He sought clarification from UNHCR on comments made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the excessive uniformity of core indicators that allegedly hinder field offices from providing reports. He was keen to understand whether field offices would be precluded from providing reports in the absence of relevant data.

3. He expressed concern about the vulnerabilities identified in the new internal UNHCR systems, particularly Workday, the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy (COMPASS) as well as the Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning system (Cloud ERP), and highlighted his expectation that the organization would correct the situation and more effectively use the expensive systems. For future reports, he requested that the Office of Internal Oversight Services provide information about the extent to which key performance indicators were included in the internal audit.

4. The representative of **the Republic of Korea** noted with concern that the capacity of the Office of Internal Oversight Services had been impacted by inadequate resources. He underlined the strategic role of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in supporting the supervisory mandates of the Executive Committee relative to the organization's operations and stressed that this role required adequate funding.

5. He noted that risk assessments had not been conducted for audit processes for the regional bureaux. While there had been 21 audits for headquarters functions and 32 audits for country operations, the Office of Internal Oversight Services had conducted risk assessments for only two regional bureau audits over a three-year period. While recognizing the implications of the decentralization and regionalization process, he emphasized the need to strengthen audit processes for regional bureaux, which would contribute to the overall integrity of the Office.

6. Drawing attention to page 5 of the report, he acknowledged the general progress on the implementation of recommendations but indicated that even a 36 per cent delay in implementation was unsatisfactory, and more than one year of delay required the attention of management. While underlining the lack of implementation of recommendations in two years, he wished to understand from either UNHCR or the Office of Internal Oversight Services why recommendations to the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region and supply chain management had not been implemented.

7. Noting the importance of the effective use of limited resources and the duplication of payments of the cash programme, as well as the duplication of efforts of the organization's livelihood programme with other humanitarian agencies, he encouraged UNHCR to implement recommendations by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on mapping livelihood activities conducted by different agencies to address duplications. He reiterated his call for UNHCR to take the lead in refugee programmes by making a comprehensive plan in each country in collaboration with all players to guarantee sustainability.

8. The representative of **Switzerland** said that audits were vital for the good functioning of the UNHCR risk management system. Positive results of the external evaluation on that aspect were

welcomed. At the same time, it was worrying to note that, because of a lack of resources, five audits had not been conducted and only 21 out of 27 posts in the office were filled. As this situation was likely to persist because of the financial situation, he wished to know how the organization planned to tackle it.

9. With regard to the Global Compact on Refugees, he noted with concern that audits for the regional bureaux for the East Africa, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, and for the Southern Africa region showed that 90 per cent of pledges had not been fulfilled. Furthermore, audits on the management of partnerships financed with State entities highlighted gaps in coordination with public authorities. He requested further clarification on concrete measures the organization would employ to remedy the situation.

10. In relation to the operational constraints of UNHCR, he noted that some of the shortcomings were attributable to UNHCR partners. Therefore, the approach to be adopted differed greatly from situations where inadequacies could be directly attributed to the organization. He stressed that the report would be more useful if it made this distinction more explicit. In the event of partnership difficulties, he encouraged the organization to address them through dialogue and advocacy, as well as through its contractual modalities, particularly with State entities. He explained that recommendations along those lines could be included, for example, in the new operational guide on localization or in considerations on sustainable programming. The report could also make stronger recommendations regarding dialogue with member States regarding, for example, burden- and responsibility-sharing.

11. The representative of **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** welcomed the report by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and its key role in supporting the organization to ensure the effectiveness of its governance, risk management and control. He noted with concern the current resourcing constraints of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and reductions in non-pay budgets as well as the cancellation of five audits in the 2023 to 2024 period. Although he understood and welcomed that audits of high-risk field offices were being prioritized for the remainder of 2024, he requested further information on whether the Office of Internal Oversight Services had the required resources for the rest of the year – both in staff and non-pay budget terms – to deliver the desired audit coverage. If not, he asked what steps were being taken to ensure that resources would be available. He further noted with concern the projected under-resourcing for the Office of Internal Oversight Services in 2025.

12. He requested further information regarding the recurring Office of Internal Oversight Services recommendations on field operations and what actions the organization was taking to tackle the root causes of performance gaps. While appreciating the data provided on the implementation of audit recommendations and acknowledging the improvements in 2023 to 2024 compared to the preceding year, he encouraged UNHCR to continue reversing the trend of delayed implementation. He pointed out that although the report by the Office of Internal Oversight Services contained a wealth of insights into how controls and processes were working within the organization and highlighted areas linked to decentralization and the business transformation programme, there was no accompanying management response to it. He requested that updates on the progress in addressing improvement areas be provided by UNHCR.

13. Finally, he took particular note of the reference to a scheduled review of internal audit arrangements at UNHCR and welcomed further information on that review and its timeline. He also echoed the recommendation to take advantage of opportunities to further strengthen the classification of audit recommendations and sought clarification from the organization on how it was responding to this. He requested additional information from management on progress addressing recommendations by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee on fraud prevention mechanisms, compliance rates for mandatory training and programme monitoring.

14. The representative of **Australia** thanked UNHCR for its transparency in sharing recent audit findings and welcomed the thematic audit on gender-based violence. She was, however, concerned by the findings that gaps in the organization's strategic planning, coordination, case management and reporting impacted the delivery of services and assistance to survivors and their long-term recovery. She asked about the immediate steps the organization would take to address the identified gaps and ensure programme effectiveness.

15. Noting that the 2023 audits did not include field operations expenditure for the Asia and Pacific region, with limited auditing also undertaken in the previous two years compared to other regions, she encouraged UNHCR to consider the Asia and Pacific region as a focus for the 2025 auditing process. Even though the audit findings on safeguarding and policy implementation had proven challenging, the audit revealed gaps in compliance and controls across a broad range of issues, such as gender-based violence, livelihoods, supply chains and the affiliate workforce of UNHCR, in both country offices and regional bureaux. In light of the unfolding decentralization agenda, she asked how UNHCR would work to promote centrally created policies in its operations and how regional bureaux would be supported to provide oversight of policy implementation.

16. The representative of **the Kingdom of the Netherlands** expressed concern about inadequate audit resourcing and staffing, especially when compared to the overall growth of programmes and budgets of UNHCR. She noted the importance that contributions to UNHCR were audited by the Office of Internal Oversight Services to provide assurance of their effective use and found it unclear why the Audit Committee did not raise the issue of budget constraints of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in its report despite its role in ensuring the Office of Internal Oversight Services funding. She requested UNHCR to reflect on the foreseen impact of inadequate audit resources for 2025 and to remain transparent about the internal audit budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, both in the Standing Committee and in the Executive Committee. She asked whether UNHCR would consider funding the Office of Internal Oversight Services budget from the United Nations regular budget to ensure more transparency. She further shared concerns of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee regarding delays in the implementation of internal oversight recommendations and strongly supported improving classification measures for audit recommendations, and for UNHCR to reflect on the root causes of delayed implementation and repetition of audit recommendations.

17. The representative of **Canada** noted that the report by the Office of Internal Oversight Services highlighted 160 recommendations, 36 of which were still outstanding and had not progressed according to the timetable. He stressed the need to speed up the implementation of those recommendations by establishing robust accountability mechanisms in order to cooperate with the Office of Internal Oversight Services efficiently. While further noting concerns highlighted in the report related to challenges with interventions, provision of services, and preparedness for emergency situations, he urged UNHCR to improve its strategic planning, intra-institution coordination and case management to better support operations and improve its response to sexual and gender-based violence.

18. He welcomed the adoption of the results-based approach and the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy (COMPASS) system to improve efficiency and urged UNHCR to ensure that strategic planning and accountability were better harmonized with the operational context of each region. He encouraged UNHCR to enhance data interoperability with sister United Nations agencies, particularly in the registration process. Strengthening data integration and sharing would be crucial in mitigating fraud risks and improving the accuracy of needs assessments. That approach would increase efficient resource utilization and enhanced service delivery, especially in large refugee counts where accurate and timely information was essential.

19. Acknowledging the positive steps toward decentralization and regionalization, he underscored the need for clarity in the roles and responsibilities between headquarters and regional bureaux to avoid overlaps and ensure a coherent approach to implementing regional and global strategies. He also called on UNHCR to address gaps in staff skills and realign workforce planning to prioritize service delivery over administrative functions, which was vital for enhancing programme effectiveness.

20. He expressed appreciation for the progress made by the organization in developing its risk management framework, including the adoption of a risk appetite statement and key risk indicators. Canada supported continued efforts to enhance those mechanisms and recommended further integration of risk management into daily operational practices across operations, ensuring that all levels of the organization were equipped to mitigate and respond to risks effectively.

21. Calling attention to the report of the Board of Auditors, he expressed concern over the delays in the full implementation of the cloud enterprise resource planning system which had resulted in significant manual adjustments in financial reporting. He urged the organization to accelerate

automation of the system and strengthen user access management systems to safeguard against potential fraud or misuse of resources.

22. The representative of **Germany** welcomed the overview by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on internal audit activities as well as efforts to actively address and implement recommendations from past audit reports. He encouraged further efforts to implement audit recommendations, in particular in the area of field operations and procurement planning where the Office of Internal Oversight Services had indicated the need for stronger monitoring systems to address residual risks. While stressing the need for enhanced collaboration with other United Nations entities to work towards a unified approach to reporting and investigating fraud and corruption, he underlined the vital role of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the work of the UNHCR audit services for Germany as a member of the Executive Committee and as a large donor of the organization.

23. The representative of **the United States of America** welcomed the 2023 -2024 report as well as the update on findings and recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. With regard to the business transformation programme, she urged UNHCR to continue consolidating these structures, systems and processes to ensure behavioural change and the full adoption of results-based management, accountability, and internal controls. Supporting the call to prioritize the Committee's resolution, she highlighted its emphasis on timely closure of oversight recommendations.

24. She further welcomed the proposed performance audit of the cloud enterprise resource planning system in the upcoming audit cycle and urged UNHCR to prioritize the implementation of open recommendations. The upward trend in complaints received by the Inspector General's Office and the proactive measures to enhance intake procedures, including the potential use of artificial intelligence, was noteworthy.

25. With regard to the report by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, she commended the completion of 25 audit engagements and looked forward to engaging with UNHCR on the important issues identified. The Government of the United States of America took those findings seriously and remained committed to supporting UNHCR in addressing identified gaps, ensuring effective resource utilization, and enhancing the protection and assistance provided to displaced persons globally.

26. The **Director of the Internal Audit Division (OIOS)**, responding to comments, said that the financial constraints of the Office of Internal Oversight Services were the result of the financial constraints of UNHCR itself. While additional support was being sought from the management board to maintain adequate levels of operating resources, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was pursuing internal efforts to enhance its efficacy and effectiveness to sharpen planning processes through strategies like thematic audits and reflecting on coverage by the regional bureaux, control offices and headquarters to ensure a proper balance of the audit portfolio and optimize the use of limited resources. In this regard, he thanked colleagues who had been asked to do more and more every year; without their dedication, the Office of Internal Oversight Services would not have been able to maintain its level of engagement.

27. The main purpose of the Office of Internal Oversight Services was to provide recommendations to UNHCR management on improving governance risk management and internal control processes. Without implementation of the recommendations, however, the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services would be in vain. The Office of Internal Oversight Services worked with management from the formulation of a recommendation until the finalization of its relevant report to ensure timely and full implementation of recommendations, including ensuring that recommendations were smart, feasible, practical and added value. The Office of Internal Oversight Services also conducted regular monitoring, evaluation and analysis of recommendations. In this regard, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was currently engaged in finding the root causes of recurring recommendations and delayed implementation of recommendations. That analysis would provide insights for the Office of Internal Oversight Services and UNHCR management to better formulate, implement and prevent recurring recommendations.

28. In response to questions regarding recommendations to improve the presentation of the annual report and audit planning, he said that the current annual report by the Office of Internal

Oversight Services was presented in a way that highlighted its most important key performance indicators, which entailed implementation of the work plan, its acceptance and implementation of recommendations. He, however, took note of the advice from the representative of the Russian Federation to provide additional information on the key performance indicators. Regarding the coverage of regional bureaux, he said that UNHCR had commenced its 2025 risk assessment and annual work planning processes and would fully take into consideration concerns raised to ensure they were consulting with management on a rolling basis. Regarding the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee report about a delay in the completion of the internal audit arrangement review, he assured that the Office of Internal Oversight Services was working with management to finalize that process. The memorandum of understanding was being revisited to confirm the status of the Office of Internal Oversight Services as the internal auditor of UNHCR and ensure that work was performed in accordance with international standards.

29. The **Chief of the Internal Audit Service (OIOS)** responding to comments from the representative of the Russian Federation on the decentralization and regionalization process, said that the process was a work in progress but would not result in an increased workload for the Office of Internal Oversight Services. While pointing out that results from the evaluation to assess the impact of the process were near conclusion, she highlighted that the decentralization and regionalization process was not being implemented in isolation but alongside seven other ongoing transformation agenda items, such as the business transformation programme, which were crucial for strengthening the work of UNHCR. On the request to continue work on the business transformation programme, she reiterated that the Office of Internal Oversight Services was working in tandem with the oversight community to provide advice and assurances, identify risks and communicate with management under a coordination group managed by the Inspector General's Office. She emphasized that there were no duplications across the three lines of defence as UNHCR had clearly articulated the relevant roles, accountabilities and authorities. She, nonetheless, stressed the need to clarify and reinforce functional reporting lines and the roles and responsibilities between divisions and the regional bureaux.

30. Turning to comments from the representative of Switzerland on the Global Compact of Refugees, she said that the Office of Internal Oversight Services provided advice to management on addressing the issue of drafting pledges. This was aimed at understanding the underlying causes of the slow implementation of recommendations. On whether the Office of Internal Oversight Services made recommendations on burden- and responsibility-sharing by member States, she explained that UNHCR through its multi-year, multi-partner strategies, which were developed in most countries, incorporated government commitments into planning processes. She noted a marked increase in commitments by operations to mainstream refugees into national systems. She highlighted that approximately 40 per cent of funds were allocated to implementing partners who primarily provide service delivery, which meant that the implementation of recommendations pertaining to service delivery to a large degree pertained to the activities of those partners and the degree to which they lived up to their commitments. The Office of Internal Oversight Services was working with management to audit the regional bureaux, pointing out that two of the regional bureaux had been audited, while the remaining bureaux would be reviewed after a break to allow management to implement recommendations during 2024 and 2025.

31. The **Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management (UNHCR)**, responding to comments, emphasized the strategic role of the Office of Internal Oversight Services Office of Internal Oversight Services in strengthening internal controls and management efficiencies to, among other things, build trust with donors and the general public. He reaffirmed that the recommendations by the Office of Internal Oversight Services were treated as a high priority, as was evidenced by the relative increase in the number of recommendations closed in 2023. The two outstanding recommendations for the regional bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region were related to procurement and required a change of strategy that would likely take another cycle or two before the effects of that change were visible.

32. He provided detailed information on the implementation process of the Office of Internal Oversight Services recommendations, including the root causes of delayed implementation. The indicator guidance notes of core impact and outcome indicators had been revised, and improvements would come to fruition by 2025 to enhance the data quality. The 24 core output indicators that were used in the 2024 cycle would strengthen the ability of the organization to meet a diverse range of monitoring and reporting demands. In the 2023 Global Report, UNHCR explored several ways to

display the analysis of core indicators comparing 2022 with 2023, including many global-level aggregations. He acknowledged concerns raised by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on Workday, the Comprehensive Protection and Solutions Strategy (COMPASS), and the cloud enterprise resource planning system.

33. With regard to comments from the representative of Canada about the reports by the United Nations Board of Auditors, the cloud enterprise resource planning system, access controls and the financial reports from partners, he explained that there was an ongoing project to improve previously used manual systems. While stressing that the financial report delays were related to partners, he said that as part of the new systems, the organization had designed an end-to-end process for partner reports that would address that delay.

34. Turning to comments about partnership and dialogue by Switzerland, he said it involved inter-agency work to ensure that there were no gaps or overlaps and that work was more coordinated. A set of position statements had been incorporated to help determine whether the organization was best placed to build the capacity of government institutions in a particular country and what criteria or conditions should be placed on any financial reporting. Related to the decentralization and regionalization process, UNHCR will leverage stronger regional bureaux to assist country operations to develop medium to longer-term country-level plans and strengthen government capacity. Additionally, new systems and procedures had been introduced to improve real-time monitoring and oversight of all partnerships.

35. Responding to questions from the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands on funding the Office of Internal Oversight Services from the regular budget, he said that the organization had only received \$46 million from the regular budget. Funding the Office of Internal Oversight Services would take a considerable part of that and require rebalancing within headquarters given the limited amount of indirect support costs received in donor contributions.

36. Regarding challenges in preventing and responding to gender-based violence, he explained that the report was for the 2021 to 2022 period, which focused on a number of countries, namely, Bangladesh, Greece, Mexico, Niger (the), Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Yemen. He noted that although there were no critical recommendations in the report, it brought up a number of areas for consideration. With regard to the question on case management, he said that 75 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers reported satisfaction with the gender-based violence case management services in 2023. The organization also increased its deployment capacity of specialists on gender-based violence from four to seven persons in 2024, as well as three deployable specialists on gender-based violence.

37. The **Senior Liaison Officer (UNHCR)** welcomed comments on the delayed implementation of audit recommendations and said that progress had been made for the period under review, with 126 recommendations closed following intense consultative work with the Office of Internal Oversight Services. He drew attention to the ongoing analysis by the organization to understand the reasons for delayed implementation of some recommendations.

38. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)**, while pointing out that all points raised during the meeting were taken extremely seriously, stressed that the report from the Office of Internal Oversight Services was generally positive for UNHCR. With regard to long-standing recommendations, she underlined that recommendations were taken on board while pointing out that their implementation could take several years, depending on the recommendation. In response to the comments about the memorandum of understanding, she mentioned that they had received advice from the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, and she expected those discussions to be concluded soon. Regarding accountability and the three lines of defence model, UNHCR would finalize a revised accountability framework to take into account findings from the decentralization and regionalization strategy. The official guidance policy had been revised recently, which brought together efforts to streamline and simplify guidance, reset the approach for future years and incorporate a cost element into establishing policies. The number of regulatory documents had been reduced by 40 per cent since 2020. This revision was a result of implementing the advice of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the United Nations Board of Auditors, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee and other oversight entities.

39. She clarified that the budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services formed part of the centrally managed funds for the organization to ensure that the efforts and outputs of the Office of Internal Oversight Services remained at the same level. The 2025 budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services represented the same level of output as 2024, a situation which contrasted with budget reductions in the organization's operations and headquarters functions for 2025. She said that decisions were made in consideration of the universe of oversight advice received to ensure that the OIOS was sufficiently resourced.

40. Responding to the representative of Uganda who sought clarification on staff realignment where it concerned actual reductions in costs, she referred to the estimated cost savings provided by the Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management, emphasizing that the figure was calculated by estimating what the organization would not pay in salaries and benefits for the net reduction in the number of posts and involved other considerations such as cost differences between a discontinued and terminated post.

**(iv) Report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC)  
(EC/75/SC/CRP.19)**

41. The **Chairperson of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC)**, recalling that members of the Standing Committee had received advance copies of the UNHCR annual report covering the period June 2023 to June 2024, began her presentation by highlighting the advisory mandate of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee to the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Executive Committee in the exercise of their oversight responsibilities in accordance with relevant best practices, industry standards and applicable rules and regulations. She said that while gaps and weaknesses had been identified and brought to the management's attention, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee was of the overall view that UNHCR was fundamentally sound in terms of oversight and accountability. She noted that active oversight coordination among oversight entities was taking place in terms of output planning and follow-up among both internal and external entities. This was important in order to deliver third line assurance and learning efficiently and effectively, maximizing audit coverage and avoiding unnecessary duplication.

42. She commended UNHCR for the completion of its 2023 financial statements in the context of the changeover of the financial system and software, noting that some difficulties and delays were encountered and dealt with. The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee noted with concern the impact of the decrease in funding of operations, reserves and liquidity and emphasized the unqualified audit opinion of the United Nations Board of Auditors and their understanding and support in adapting the work plan to difficulties encountered by UNHCR in the 2023 audit cycle. She said the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee appreciated the efforts of management to implement and close both internal and external oversight recommendations during the period, stressing that all open oversight recommendations represented unaddressed issues and risks. She encouraged continued focus on recommendations, including potential prioritization of more critical risks through the recategorization of audit results both by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and management. Pointing to recommendations that had been made over the years, she noted that they were all categorized as important and called on the Office of Internal Oversight Services to categorize recommendations more sharply to help focus the attention of management. With regard to internal audit services, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee encouraged UNHCR and the Office of Internal Oversight Services to complete the now overdue internal audit arrangements to reflect current best practices and upcoming changes to professional standards for internal auditing and to include key performance indicators for the internal audit function.

43. Acknowledging the disruptive effect of funding uncertainties on staff and the discontinuation of about 1,000 positions during the period, the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee noted the importance of a holistic and supportive environment among the independent and management functions dealing with workplace concerns based on the principles of cooperation and mutual respect for the respective roles of those entities. The Independent Audit and Oversight Committee welcomed the new policy on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and harassment and recognized the organization's leadership role in that area at the inter-agency level as well as where UNHCR policy and practice may be seen as examples of best practice. Drawing attention to the rollout of the final components of the business transformation programme, the regional bureaux, and the structural



and system reforms, she noted that the positive potential of the changes had not yet been fully realized in terms of impact on efficiency and effectiveness as well as accountability and oversight

44. She expressed concern about the gap between funding needs and funding received and acknowledged efforts by UNHCR to strengthen, diversify and expand its donor base. Noting that the actual budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services was in line with actual resources that had been utilized in previous years, she further expressed concern about the reduction in the budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. She encouraged the finalization of the terms of reference for the internal audit, including key performance indicators at a much more granular level to help the Office of Internal Oversight Services, management and the Standing Committee to monitor effectiveness and efficiency and benchmarking of resources with similar organizations. She expected management and the Office of Internal Oversight Services to leverage the availability of data from the business transformation programme to focus audit work more efficiently. She noted continued progress in risk management including the development of a risk appetite statement and practical tools such as key risk indicators to assist managers at all levels.

45. The representative of Switzerland encouraged UNHCR to give full attention to the recommendations of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee to maintain the performance of the enterprise resource planning system, particularly in the face of budgetary cuts and the need to efficiently manage the increased number of complaints received by the Inspector General's office without affecting the quality of its work. He said that internal audit modalities dealt with the delays in implementing recommendations of internal audits and prioritizing efficient measures to ensure better access of staff, country and regional bureaux to the Ombudsman and Mediator services. He encouraged UNHCR to identify measures to avoid negative consequences of reduced revenues on operations, in particular through sustainable planning and programming, reporting regularly on the implementation of risk mitigation measures, implementing a quality control system for the management system in order to build on the progress made in institutional transformation, strengthen respect for obligatory training, and include protection against sexual abuse and exploitation and sexual harassment.

46. The representative of **Norway**, acknowledging the organization's mandate, complexity and financing model, said it required UNHCR to uphold and comply with the highest standards of management and accountability. Prevention of fraud, corruption, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse and other forms of misconduct were essential. With regard to risk management, he made note of assurances provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the steady progress of UNHCR in bringing its risk maturity to an advanced level. He welcomed the new strategy and measures taken by UNHCR to strengthen the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in all its operations and explained that it was important for partners of UNHCR to also comply.

47. Noting concerns raised by the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee on the delays in implementation of internal oversight recommendations by UNHCR, and recurring recommendations related to field operations, he stressed the importance for UNHCR to address those issues and enhance monitoring and management systems to comply with rules and regulations. He encouraged further strengthening of the integrity and accountability functions and asked UNHCR to ensure that sufficient resources were allocated to control, integrity, and accountability functions in the 2025 budget given the organization's complex operations and risk environment.

48. The **Chairperson of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC)** welcomed the comments and thanked management for its cooperation and the Standing Committee for its continued support. She reassured that the Office of Internal Oversight Services would continue to ensure that the coverage afforded by the oversight functions were adequate for the organization.

49. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)** commended the Chairperson of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee for the report and the intensive work of colleagues over the past year, noting in particular the business transformation programme and the strengthening of oversight systems. She commended the three members of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee who had devoted six years on a voluntary basis and had provided invaluable advice to the organization during the period.

50. The **Chairperson of the Standing Committee** echoed appreciation for the work of the three members of the IAOC.

**(b) Human resources, including staff welfare (EC/75/SC/CRP.20)**

51. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)** provided detailed information on the rationalization exercise, including the discontinuation of 10 per cent of posts, followed by a presentation of how the organization was supporting affected staff. She said that the human resources teams had been providing support to colleagues through career support, development resources, psychosocial support, and individual and team coaching. Noting the High Commissioner's decision to place a temporary external hiring freeze to support colleagues whose positions had been discontinued and prioritize the experience that internal colleagues had accumulated over the years with the organization for assignments, she explained that this allowed the organization to substantially reduce the number of non-working colleagues in-between assignments.

52. She noted that multi-year efforts and investments in building a stronger people-centric foundation through the human resource transformation initiative had equipped and prepared the organization to respond to the resulting stressors. As part of the human resource transformation initiative, and in line with the organization's broader regionalization and decentralization efforts, human resource regional teams were embedded in each of the seven regions in 2019 to bring strategic support closer to the point of delivery. In subsequent years, those teams were reinforced with regional talent advisors to ensure targeted and context-specific talent and career management. In recognition of their additional responsibilities, specific support was extended to managers, individually and as a target group; one example was the Human Resource Guide on Workforce Changes, a step-by-step handbook to assist managers with the difficult task of reductions in a people-centric way. In April 2024, UNHCR launched the 2024-2026 Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, which ensured an inclusive workplace encompassing all aspects of diversity, that included, but was not limited to, gender, race, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, disability, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, socioeconomic status, and family structure. In that respect, she announced that, as of August 2024, the organization had reached gender parity at all grades in the international professional category in line with the United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity.

53. She said that UNHCR was pursuing further improvements and innovations under the three pillars of people, partnership, and technology to ensure that the organization remained efficient and adaptable and continued offering the best possible employee experience. The stabilization of the human resource digital tool, Workday, after alignment with the enterprise resource planning system and the comprehensive protection and solutions strategy (COMPASS), remained a key focus and allowed the organization to introduce hundreds of simplifications for workforce management and streamline additional processes for human resource teams. In addition, the organization launched People Chat, a new generative artificial intelligence chatbot for human resource questions in UNHCR, in partnership with the Division of Information Systems & Telecommunications and the Innovation Service. Consequently, UNHCR was leading the way for the inter-agency project to develop a common human resource generative artificial intelligence chatbot called Unify HR. She explained that UNHCR had made that technology available to sister agencies and together were in the process of developing an artificial intelligence tool to enhance operational efficiency in human resource policy administration and allow organizations to compare their respective human resource policy frameworks.

54. With regard to improving the employee experience for all colleagues, she said that the organization was piloting the centralization of insurance claims management for locally recruited colleagues and their families to strengthen the confidentiality and privacy of medical information. UNHCR had also rolled out a new medical insurance scheme for consultants and contractors to provide robust insurance coverage to colleagues, eliminating the risks and liabilities of self-insurance and reaffirming the organization's duty of care to all colleagues, including those in the affiliate category. Going forward, she emphasized that UNHCR had identified additional areas with clear improvement opportunities, including reviewing the learning and development function, the continued modernization of transactional services, and the stronger integration of talent management functions to respond to current needs.

55. The **Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Africa Group**, recognizing the commitment of UNHCR to address the rising number of global displacements through diversified, talented and effective staff despite the scale of those displacements, funding cuts and internal reorganization, highlighted the need for UNHCR to strengthen its partnership with African States to promote the equitable distribution of human resources and ensure that frontline staff were appropriately supported in an equitable manner.

56. The Africa Group, noting the progress made on gender equality and geographic diversity, also highlighted the importance of greater representation of the African region. Pointing out that 33.4 per cent of the operational staff of UNHCR were deployed to sub-Saharan Africa, the group reiterated its call for increased staff recruitment from that region and taking into account local contexts when making strategic decisions. The group said that the reorganization and reduction in staff numbers within UNHCR had had a significant impact on operations in Africa and called on the organization to guarantee greater assistance to affected staff, ensuring that staff cut decisions did not compromise the capacity to meet urgent needs in the complex humanitarian context of the continent.

57. The group encouraged UNHCR to step up its consultations with African States and local partners throughout the realignment process in order to ensure continuity of its operations and to adjust support measures to realities in Africa. The group reiterated its call for an inclusive approach to human resource management to ensure a safe, equitable and respectful working environment, particularly for staff deployed in high-risk regions in Africa. The Africa group expressed support for the organization's efforts to modernize its human resources management using technology, but also insisted on the need to provide capacity building and training at a local level for African colleagues on the use of those technological tools. He reassured that African countries stood ready to work closely with UNHCR to meet the challenges of population movements in the continent. The group encouraged UNHCR to continue in its efforts to diversify and support staff and pursue its partnership with African States to build a resilient and inclusive humanitarian environment that was centred on displaced and stateless persons.

58. The representative of **Canada** welcomed efforts made by UNHCR to improve its practice in the field of human resources including prioritizing staff well-being by introducing a new strategy on mental health in the workplace to safeguard the organization's resilience. Noting the requirement for staff cuts, he encouraged closely monitoring the long-term effects on staff mental health and on operational capacity. He commended the progress made towards gender parity and the expanded initiatives to support equity, diversity and inclusion and said that the progress demonstrated the commitment of the organization to achieve an inclusive and representative workforce that was able to respond to the complex needs of displaced populations around the world. Canada was looking forward to the complete implementation of that strategy, including appropriate geographic representation, and encouraged UNHCR to continue to closely monitor its impact, particularly on recruitment, retention and career advancement of the staff concerned.

59. The representative of **Switzerland** acknowledged that UNHCR staff were facing a difficult situation as the number of displaced persons in the world continued to rise and staff numbers had been reduced by 10 per cent. He appreciated the measures taken to support affected staff by offering customized services, information sessions and regular contact with the global staff council and by providing psychosocial support to managers. Although he agreed that the external hiring freeze was justified in that context, he requested additional and more precise information about the impact of that measure on staff. He acknowledged that given the ongoing stressors, the organization's attention to the prevention of sexual harassment and exploitation and abuse was welcome and should continue. He called for attention to staff diversity, not just in achieving gender parity but also in recruiting people affected by forced displacement. In this regard, he asked whether the 100 refugee advisors who were involved in the Global Refugee Forum would be provided the opportunity to join UNHCR as staff, as this would be concrete evidence of the commitment to allow significant participation of refugees. He welcomed improvements to the human resource management systems through Workday, for instance, and wished to know how UNHCR would address potential risks in efficiency where administrative staff were spared staff cuts to the detriment of operational staff. He also sought clarification on how the organization would address problems in retaining qualified staff.

60. The representative of **Uganda** endorsed the statement made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Africa Group. She thanked the Deputy High Commissioner for comprehensively elaborating on the response to her question relative to budget savings and

appreciated that it not only entailed the budget but also improvements in efficiency and rationalization. She recognized the work of UNHCR staff, congratulated the organization on achieving gender parity, and urged the organization to also aspire to geographical diversity, in particular at the senior management level. She sought clarification on how UNHCR would tackle concerns raised about staff in between assignments and asked if disaggregated statistics could be shared on the gender and geographical background of the staff in between assignments. She also wished to know how UNHCR had realigned the business transformation programme against the existing documentation and rules of procedure for hiring and termination. On the decentralization process, she wished to know about the specific functions of the regional offices, including whether they were delegated to provide only advisory services or had they been given hiring and firing powers, and whether they relieved the work of the division of human resources.

61. The representative of **the Russian Federation** emphasized that the staff of UNHCR were the main asset of the organization, so using that asset with due attention and respect, as was the tradition in the United Nations system by adopting decisions of the governing bodies on human resource management would have a positive impact on accountability and transparency. Drawing attention to Article 101 of the United Nations Charter and recent observations by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, he said that staff must be selected to achieve the needed geographical diversity. He expected effective measures to be taken by the organization to improve the situation. He sought clarification on whether UNHCR planned to implement the United Nations Secretary-General's UN 2.0 initiative and what the timeframe and potential impact of this would be. He further requested UNHCR to share its views on the impact of artificial intelligence on the working processes and on staffing needs. He requested that UNHCR provide information on when the external hiring freeze will end, as well as on the average hiring timeframes for new staff.

62. With regard to decentralization, and in light of existing difficulties in using the new business transformation programme, he called on the division of human resources to carry out a comprehensive skills mapping to identify potential shortcomings and take measures to improve the effectiveness of the human resources system. He echoed calls to evaluate the impact of decentralization on staff, with due focus on the impact on field missions and headquarters. He expressed concern about the continued problem of fraud and said that a systemic approach to prevent and combat such violations was needed. He observed with regret that UNHCR was continuing to interpret the term diversity in a very broad manner despite the existence of a definition provided by the International Civil Service Commission and the relevant 2018 report which was subsequently adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

63. The representative of **Ethiopia** endorsed the statement made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Africa Group. He acknowledged the commitment and dedication of the UNHCR workforce, many of whom were risking their lives in difficult environments, and asked whether the decrease in workforce had impacted on staff well-being or operations. He called for existing barriers to joining the organization to be removed without compromising professionalism and stressed the need for geographical diversity. He pointed to the seeming disparity in geographical representation regarding staff recruitment and said that a freeze on external recruitment would affect the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion and its service to affected people. He commended the organization for achieving gender parity and sought clarification on how the organization would respond to the increasing humanitarian crises by maintaining only internal staff.

64. The representative of **the Republic of Korea** commended UNHCR for achieving gender parity and agreed that it was crucial to maintain professionalism while enhancing diversity. He echoed calls for an increase in geographical representation. He sought clarification on whether the difference in regional divisions as set out by the standard United Nations geographical categories of five regions and recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions against the seven geographical categories as determined by the operational needs of UNHCR would affect the achievement of the United Nations geographical diversity strategy overall. He asked UNHCR to clarify how regional diversity was explained and encouraged in the new Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

65. The representative of **Kenya**, while acknowledging the work of 37 per cent of UNHCR staff who were in hardship duty stations and were often far away from their families and social networks, paid tribute to staff who had lost their lives in the line of duty. She lauded the commitment of

UNHCR to achieve gender parity and welcomed initiatives being undertaken to strengthen women's leadership and management development. Recalling the race, equality and equity action plan of UNHCR, she requested the organization to share progress on implementation. Affirming that a well-supported workforce was able to better care for others, she took note of the establishment of committees on occupational health and safety in all regions at the end of 2023 and the newly launched UNHCR strategy for workplace mental health and psychosocial well-being and commended the organization's attention to the well-being of staff at headquarters and in the field offices.

66. The representative of **Denmark** acknowledged that the organizational realignment process, which resulted from financial constraints over the past year, had taken a toll on UNHCR staff. He welcomed the measures taken by the organization to mitigate the impact and support affected staff. He further welcomed the strengthened focus on mental health and the efforts to promote an inclusive, safe and diverse workplace. Echoing the appreciation for achieving gender parity at all levels of the organization, he commended the new Strategic Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, which he said testified to the organization's commitment to leverage the full potential of a diverse workforce, and ongoing work to address biases and create equal opportunities for all. He noted the efforts to prevent sexual misconduct of any form and the roll-out of the misconduct scheme as a supplement to the ClearCheck platform to mitigate the risk of hiring individuals who may be subject to substantiated allegations in other organizations.

67. The representative of **the United States of America** emphasized that people are at the core of the organization, and staff well-being was key to maintaining the high standards of the services of UNHCR. She welcomed the organization's new Strategic Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, as well as the progress made towards gender parity. She said that it was imperative for the framework and its implementation to advance explicit protections for staff based on sexual orientation and gender identity. She welcomed further elaboration in writing of those protections and the organization's commitment to provide a safe, enabling, and supportive environment that valued all personnel irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. She appreciated the recent commitment made by the High Commissioner to the new United Nations Strategy on Protection from Violence and Discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) persons and looked forward to its implementation. She expressed the expectation that UNHCR will uphold its internal and external commitments to inclusion and diversity.

68. The representative of **Australia** congratulated UNHCR for its achievements in progressing gender parity in its workforce and leadership roles and encouraged greater equity in the geographic representation of staff. She welcomed the Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion of the organization, which she said would help improve the response it provided to the people it aimed to serve. In terms of staffing, she acknowledged the recent efforts to align the size of the workforce to financing, noting the impact this had had on staff, and recognized the organization's effort to support affected staff. In light of audit findings regarding gaps in staff capacity in operations and the organization's intentions towards sustainable programming, she asked how UNHCR would ensure it had the right set of skills and experience for its future workforce. Expressing deep concern about the increasing number of fatalities and incidents involving humanitarian personnel, she said that Australia was committed to working with UNHCR to support the protection of and assistance to forcibly displaced and stateless people while maintaining the safety of humanitarian workers, including the 25 per cent of UNHCR staff who were from the affiliate workforce.

69. The representative of **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** welcomed the publication of the Strategic Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and looked forward to further information and updates. She appreciated the continued commitment of the organization to the safety and wellbeing of all its staff, explaining that a steadfast approach to gender equity, diversity and inclusion underpinned the collective commitment to prioritize the safety and protection of all. She appreciated the steps the organization was taking to human resources and broader people issues, while also sensitively handling a challenging year dealing with workforce reductions. She took particular note of the release of the organization's Workforce Planning Handbook and requested an update from UNHCR on its implementation and an assessment of remaining challenges and ways to mitigate those. She welcomed that Workday was shortening recruitment timelines and asked UNHCR to share a further update on the reduction in average recruitment times already seen and any projected further reductions.

70. The representative of **Germany** noted the report on staff realignment and measures taken in response to support UNHCR staff and their families while ensuring the capacity of UNHCR to deliver on its mandate and looked forward to continuing the dialogue on measures and impact. He expressed Germany's continued commitment to ensuring the well-being of the organization's workforce and support and advocacy for the protection and safety of humanitarian workers. He further welcomed the new Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and applauded UNHCR for reaching gender parity in the professional categories.

71. The representative of **Malawi** endorsed the statement made by the Democratic Republic of the Congo on behalf of the Africa Group. She commended the organization for achieving gender parity at all levels. Although she acknowledged the limited resources available to UNHCR, she stressed that the same level of parity should be achieved with geographical representation in terms of recruitment both at local and international levels from the sub-Saharan region. She wished to know what plans UNHCR had in place to achieve geographical representation within the organization.

72. The representative of **the Islamic Republic of Iran** noted that the allocation of positions to citizens of host countries in the 2024 staffing table did not seem to sufficiently reflect the contributions countries made in hosting refugees. Pointing out that the disparity may affect the sense of ownership and engagement in humanitarian efforts among underrepresented host nations, he urged UNHCR to ensure career opportunities were proportionally aligned with the burden each hosting country shouldered. He requested UNHCR to prepare a revised staffing table or graphical representation illustrating the distribution of international professional staff by nationality to provide insight into how resources and roles are distributed equitably across member States.

73. The **European Union**, as an observer, recognized the tremendous efforts undertaken by UNHCR and staff during the realignment process, including workforce reductions. The European Union expressed trust that UNHCR was doing its best to stabilize and mitigate the impact on both its operations and personnel, despite the constraints on external recruitment. The European Union praised UNHCR for actively supporting staff mobility and taking part in the Junior Professional Officer programme. Although the European Union commended the organization for achieving full gender parity, it requested further information about ongoing efforts at the P4 and D1 levels, where progress could still be made. The European Union requested additional information on the efforts in providing career opportunities for local staff and balancing the local staff and expatriate ratio to strengthen local capacities.

74. The European Union encouraged continuing to foster an inclusive, respectful workplace culture and applying a strict zero-tolerance and victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. Welcoming the newly launched UNHCR strategy for workplace mental health and psychosocial well-being, the European Union said that the organization also needed to maintain a strong security risk management culture, notably with improved technological tools such as Workday. Calling on UNHCR to build on its first Strategic Framework on Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion for the period from 2024 to 2026 and the related advisory group, with concrete measures for both staff at headquarters and in the field, the European Union invited UNHCR to apply the United Nations Strategy on Protection from Violence and Discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer persons.

75. The **Director of the Division of Human Resources (UNHCR)**, responding to questions about the need to achieve geographical diversity following the achievement of gender parity, said that although there remained a lot to be done, it was also crucial to consider all aspects of diversity that staff brought to the table. Addressing comments made on geographical distribution, she said that 32 per cent of the workforce was from sub-Saharan Africa, representing the second largest group. With regard to regional bureaux, she said that their directors had been delegated authority for making hiring decisions up to the P4 level and were also supported by human resource partners present in each of the regions. On the realignment exercise, she appreciated the recognition of the mental health strategy and drew attention to the presence of staff health and well-being teams in all seven regions and headquarters, with close coordination with the global staff council. She commended Germany for its support of the organization's mental health initiatives.

76. On the United Nations Strategy on Protection from Violence and Discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer persons and the UNHCR Diversity, Equity, and

Inclusion Strategic Framework for 2024-2026, she said that as one of the co-drafters of the strategy, UNHCR remained confident that both strategies, together with the rules for misconduct and staff behaviour and the code of conduct, set a good frame for protecting and looking after colleagues. In addition, she explained that in the area of sexual orientation and gender identity UNHCR worked with the United Nations Globe representatives in this regard and had dedicated human resource focal points to quickly address staff concerns. After providing an overview of the human resources transformation roadmap, she highlighted that with regards to the diversity and inclusion tracking, indicators that monitor multiple aspects of diversity were being developed.

77. Responding to the question from the representative of Uganda on staff in between assignments, she noted that there were 163 non-working colleagues in between assignments who were still on the UNHCR payroll but not currently assigned either temporarily or on a regular assignment. Out of that number, 35.6 per cent were female and 64.4 per cent were male. Regarding the length of the freeze in external recruitment, she said that the dynamic nature of a rotational organization such as UNHCR required constant measurement of processes. For this reason, the High Commissioner had been encouraged to review the process every three months. Recalling that the freeze was a temporary measure, she assured that the organization needed new talent but would, in the meantime, prioritize colleagues with experience with the organization, including refugees with the Refugee United Nations Volunteers programme who now qualify as having UNHCR experience so that they can apply to positions. Responding to the representative of Australia on the question of safety for all staff regardless of contractual modality, she said that the organization had secured insurance coverage for colleagues from the affiliate workforce, which allowed for better deployment in emergencies. Turning to the question on the impact of the business transformation programme, she explained that the referenced error in the termination procedure occurred with the Workday system, where a 30-day notice period instead of the legally required 15-day notice was provided. The error was fixed as soon as it was discovered and longer notice periods were now provided.

**(c) Oral update on integrity in UNHCR**

78. The **Deputy High Commissioner (UNHCR)**, after recalling ongoing efforts to support the organization's workforce who had been affected by the realignment exercise, began her presentation with an update on the activities implemented by the integrity-related entities of UNHCR, namely the Enterprise Risk Management Service, Ethics Office, the Ombudsman and Mediator, and the Office of the Principal Advisor on Protection from Sexual Misconduct. She underscored that the organization continued to invest in promoting a speak-up culture and informal conflict resolution. In May, UNHCR launched the "Resolution is more than a solution" mediation campaign to encourage colleagues to speak within teams and operations and use mediation as an "informal-first approach." The Ethics Office also played an important role in supporting the speak-up culture of UNHCR and mitigating the escalation of conflicts in the workplace. In 2023, the Office received nearly 60 requests from personnel for support with protection from retaliation. This represented a 28 per cent increase from the previous year. Out of those 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.

79. She noted that the increase in complaints and caseloads received by all those offices in the past year was an encouraging sign of increased awareness about the key role those entities played in fostering a speak-up culture within the organization and trust in the integrity systems. Acknowledging that there was still underreporting across the systems, she said that the organization sought to strengthen its work through a new UNHCR Policy on Addressing Sexual Misconduct, which was adopted in 2024 to codify and clearly outline individual and collective responsibilities and accountabilities in the fight against sexual misconduct. That policy would build on and reinforce existing policy on a victim-centred approach in addressing sexual misconduct, ensuring that the organization's work was guided by the needs and wishes of survivors. In the last four years, UNHCR had established a specialized victim care team, launched the innovative NotOnlyMe platform, and shared good practices with other agencies across the system. Significant investment had also gone into prevention efforts through enhanced learning initiatives for both UNHCR and partner personnel to better identify, prevent, and respond to sexual misconduct, including sensitizing staff to the role the organizational and workplace culture can play in giving rise to that form of misconduct.

80. She said that another area in which UNHCR continued to invest was in identifying, mitigating, and addressing integrity risks. That organization-wide effort was supported by a risk

management network, which was highlighted as an area of strength for the organization in the last report of the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN). She expressed appreciation for the considerable progress that had been made in defining the UNHCR risk appetite in various operational areas, with strong messaging on the need to proactively manage integrity risks and maintain ethical standards. She pointed out that in the constantly changing and often difficult contexts in which UNHCR operated, integrity and accountability remained key priorities. She stressed that efforts went beyond identifying and responding to misconduct in all its forms but also entailed fostering a cultural shift and embracing new ways of working among both colleagues and partner personnel.

81. The representative of **Uganda** commended the Deputy High Commissioner, the Ethics Office, the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Chief Risk Officer and the Principal Advisor on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment and others whose work had culminated in the considerable gains made in addressing sexual misconduct. She asked whether hosting countries could be included in briefings related to integrity issues as hosting countries were equally interested in accessing such information.

82. The representative of **Canada** welcomed the adoption of the organization's new policy in the fight against sexual abuse and the 2023 -2025 implementation of the strategy and action plan to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. He expressed support for the commitments to the United Nations ClearCheck system and the NotOnlyMe tool that was being implemented. He welcomed the steps towards a speak-up culture, acknowledging that the rise in the number of cases demonstrated greater confidence in the mechanisms put in place to protect staff against retaliation. He thanked the Inspector General's Office for its relentless commitment in fostering an environment of integrity, respect and accountability, emphasizing that the recent update provided an overall view of efforts made to uphold ethics and protect staff well-being and the people served by the organization. He acknowledged the significant progress made in the last year in the field of enhancing capacity, risk management and preventing sexual exploitation and harassment, and said that the increased participation in training on dialogue, the code of conduct, and the expanded role of the office underscored the commitment of UNHCR to foster a value-based culture. Commending the progress in defining the risk appetite and piloting approaches in select countries, he urged UNHCR to maintain momentum in those areas, including continuing efforts to enhance the effectiveness and consistency of risk management practices, particularly within country operations. He further called for continued assessment of those tools and for any necessary adjustment to be made based on feedback in accordance with accountability to the populations protected by the organization. He recommended that UNHCR actively engage in inter-agency forums and assume its role in setting standards for the United Nations system.

83. The representative of **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** welcomed the continued efforts of UNHCR to consolidate integrity functions and processes and the subsequent comprehensive overview of the organization's activities in that area. She further welcomed the organization's continued efforts in ensuring the prevention of, protection from, and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, including protection from retaliation when reporting cases. Noting the increase in the number of staff who benefit from code of conduct training, she asked whether the objective was to train all staff and make the training mandatory. She also noted the increase in requests to the Ethics Office for individual ethics guidance and welcomed further information on whether the Ethics Office had the requisite capacity to manage that increased workload.

84. She took note of and supported the work of the Enterprise Risk Management Service and Office of the Ombudsman and Mediator and commended the introduction of the policy on sexual misconduct, which was adopted earlier in 2024. She acknowledged the encouraging use of the NotOnlyMe tool in its first year and asked the organization to provide regular updates on its impact. While acknowledging the independently recognized improvements in the organization's risk management culture, she pointed to findings that future enhancements at the country level were needed. She further noted that despite its numerous and significant accomplishments, UNHCR continued to face challenges that required ongoing improvement and adaptation and strongly encouraged UNHCR to continue to focus and make progress on those issues.

*The meeting adjourned at 1 p.m.*