

Statement to the 75th session of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Introductory remarks by Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner

Room XIX, Palais des Nations

17 October 2024

Madam Chair,
High Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,
Excellencies,

It is a pleasure to be with you for this 75th session of UNHCR's Executive Committee. And a particular pleasure this year to hear Noor and Nosizi on Monday, during the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. What inspiring examples of the agency, of the potential of the people with whom UNHCR works. Powerful reminders of why we meet here every year; to find solutions for all displaced and stateless people. And solutions are needed more than ever, as we have heard throughout the week, starting with the High Commissioner on Monday.

Life is incredibly fragile, something we often overlook until faced with adversity. Those forced to flee know all too well how fast everything can change. This fall we have witnessed more insecurity, more conflicts, and consequently more people forced to flee. We see the laws of war trampled every day, be it in the escalating and spreading conflict in the Middle East, the worsening emergency in Sudan, or the Ukraine war – to name just a few.

Amid these challenging times UNHCR is responding in 588 locations across the globe with over 1,200 partners, most of them local actors. 85% of our partners are local and national responders and they now receive 57% of our partnership funding – without a doubt, they are the foundation of our efforts. And we remain focused on delivering with one shared goal in mind: to protect, aid and solve with those forced to flee. While we scale up our presence in new emergencies and provide lifesaving aid, we also work for solutions to forced displacement and advocate for everyone to have the right to a nationality. We do this together; we do this through partnership.

All of us working together is also the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees. And as the High Commissioner noted, we are accelerating our efforts to deliver on this vision, adapting the way we program and deliver. Working towards a world where displacement is history, and everyone has a nationality.

Distinguished delegates,

To meet present and future challenges, UNHCR has increased substantially its efforts to work collaboratively under the broader UN reform, UN 2.0 and the UN's efficiency agenda. We launched a new publication on Monday – Beyond Borders, which highlights our fundamental shifts over the past eight years. I am proud to say that we have modernized the way we work in line with the Global Compact, making considerable strides in efficiency, agility, collaboration, and inclusivity. We have decentralized decision-making, bringing it closer to operations and the people we serve. We have embedded innovation, data, and technology into our processes. The organization is now better equipped to tackle unprecedented global displacement.

We have come a long way, but there is no room for complacency. UNHCR is developing a comprehensive roadmap to "deliver better", primarily led by our new Design and Development Service to continue driving change to do more for those who rely on us.

Two weeks ago, I joined deputies from other UN agencies and entities to further our work to modernize the UN as a whole. It was frankly an incubation of great ideas for the system. Our change agenda together is ambitious but essential to find ways to address daunting challenges facing us in complex operational contexts. Expect to hear more from us on our use of generative AI, predictive analytics, behavioral science, the multilateral value proposition, innovative finance and strengthening the UN to be nimbler and more efficient.

UNHCR offers its best ideas to the UN system, and we continue to innovate. For example, we are on track to meet our target of generating \$5 million in savings through right sizing and right profiling our fleet. We are investing in greening our operations and transitioning our offices to renewable energy, targeting 80% of office emissions for solarization, particularly in climate-vulnerable regions. Ten offices will be solar powered by year-end, reducing our CO2 output by up to 2,500 metric tons a year. Our cutting-edge use of financial technology to improve how we manage our treasury functions, especially in processing payments for our cash-based programs, is now on offer to the system. And we are working closely with the private sector, to learn from their experiences in achieving efficiencies. Our commitment to deliver more for refugees and others with whom we work is a corporate and individual accountability for all colleagues.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

To guide us in becoming an even stronger organization, we have benefitted from the recommendations from external and internal oversight entities. And I am pleased that UNHCR has improved in the implementation of outstanding audit recommendations. Evaluations are another important element of how we improve performance. This year we were assessed by the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network, or MOPAN. The assessment highlighted our leadership in forced displacement situations, and our strong risk management practices. And I hope many of you had the chance to attend today's side event on the independent evaluation of UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization, another important learning moment. These recommendations are extremely useful for us to continue refining our systems to improve impact and optimize efficiencies.

Distinguished delegates,

Turning to our budget: this year's budget stands at nearly \$10.8 billion dollars. It includes the supplemental request for the Sudan situation. . And as the High Commissioner mentioned, UNHCR is also responding in Lebanon and Syria, where resources are urgently required. Along with Ukraine, we are now facing three mega-emergencies, all with massive humanitarian impact and grave consequences for international peace and security in addition to many other situations to which we respond. Although not under UNHCR's mandate, resources are also being strained because of the severe repercussions of the conflict in Gaza.

The proposed annual programme budget for 2025 – in the amount of \$10.2 billion – reflects these immense humanitarian needs. Increasingly, our budgets will focus more on strengthening self-reliance, and moving toward more sustainable response models, in support of the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. This also requires redoubling our efforts to develop national capacities.

We recognize the crucial role hosts play, especially those providing access to local economies and services. And we are grateful to Member States who have increased their contributions to UNHCR in the past couple of months. While now in a better place, UNHCR is only 45% funded, forcing us to make difficult choices impacting people forced to flee. We heard earlier that the Sudan Refugee Response Plan is only 27% funded, for example and most of that funding is coming from a handful of Member States. The situation is not sustainable, and we urgently call for more countries to step up and become donors to UNHCR. We also urgently need more flexible, especially unearmarked funding, which allows us to deploy immediately in emergencies and deliver protection in overlooked crises.

UNHCR continues to engage with private sector and to expand our donor base, with now three million individual supporters. And we are building on our achievements in innovative financing and Islamic philanthropy and exploring climate financing. One area where we stand ready to support is States' innovative use of financial instruments. Recently, we have seen States agree to impressive debt-for-nature swaps. We stand ready to help explore ways for debt swaps to support climate-affected host and refugee communities, in line with national adaptation plans and UNHCR's Climate Strategy and Action Plan.

Madam Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Our strength lies in our diverse and dedicated workforce. In April of this year, the High Commissioner launched UNHCR's first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Framework, which sets a clear strategic direction to include these elements in all aspects of our work. We reached a milestone at the end of August, when we achieved gender parity at all levels of our international workforce, and we are close to doing so with our national colleagues as well. And we continue to promote equal opportunities for women in leadership, strengthening gender-sensitive policies, and promoting an inclusive workplace culture, in line with broader UN strategies.

We know that if our workforce is not well, they are unable to support others who lean on us. We have taken serious steps to invest in mental health and psychosocial wellbeing for our workforce, to mirror this priority in our program delivery. Last week was World Mental Health Day, and especially given global events, it is no secret that some of our colleagues have faced a significant personal toll. There is a saying that you cannot pour from an empty cup. This is especially true when you work in a field of endless and growing needs.

And our colleagues have been through a lot lately. From worsening conflict situations with less security, new systems, and last year's exercise that resulted in the reduction of 6% of our positions, it has an impact, and continues to affect individuals, teams, and managers. You will hear more about this tomorrow from the Global Staff Council, with whom we are working closely to support affected colleagues.

During times of transition, it is essential to uphold our strong culture of accountability, trust and transparency, along with robust systems for reporting possible misconduct and abuse. As you know, we have invested in strengthening both our formal and informal integrity systems over the last years. As a result, we have seen a rise in complaints, indicating growing awareness and trust in our integrity systems. You will soon hear more from the Inspector General on this account. He will also touch upon our work to support survivors of sexual misconduct, indeed a high priority for the organization.

Distinguished delegates,

Before closing, I want to turn to the extraordinary people with and for whom we work. People who when given the opportunity can fulfill their potential and contribute to the societies in which they live.

One example is South Sudanese refugee, Monica Malith, who we heard open the Summit of the Future in New York last month. She called on all Member States' collective responsibility to support people forced to flee. When she spoke, you could hear a pin drop in the UN assembly hall. Monica called for more justice, more equity, and more humanity. And her speech speaks to what can be achieved if and when we work together to include people forced to flee in our communities and services. No solutions can be effective without forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Madame Chair,
High Commissioner,

In closing, our continued commitment to transform and modernize UNHCR is not just about championing innovation and changing systems, but about changing lives. Thank you for being part of this effort, and for your support to the now close to 123 million people forced to flee.