

**71<sup>st</sup> Session of the Executive Committee**

**October 2020**

**Speech, Inspector General's Office**

**Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General**

*Chairperson,*

*Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,*

Good morning. I am honoured to have been appointed as UNHCR's Inspector General; and to have the privilege to work on behalf of the persons of concern whom UNHCR serves.

My appointment has come at a period of significant change and challenge: globally from the pandemic; within UNHCR; and within the Inspector General's Office itself. Today, I will present the work of the Inspector General's Office, an independent oversight entity that supports the effective, efficient and accountable management of UNHCR's work, and plays a crucial role in promoting and upholding UNHCR's integrity commitments.

Whilst my report covers the reporting period to June 2020, I also want to provide some forward-looking comments, which complement my *Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office* (A/AC.96/1204). Given the limitations on time in this forum, I will draw your attention to key points only.

First, I want to formally thank my predecessor, Karen Madeleine Farkas, for her work to reform and improve the IGO. Her clear handover, supported by a refreshed and enhanced policy and administrative framework for the Office, have given me a firm basis to deliver oversight to UNHCR. My six-year appointment as an external appointee, and the terms of my appointment, provides me with the independence required to discharge this role effectively.

I have four key priorities: to enhance transparency and accountability to UNHCR's stakeholders; to support the High Commissioner with high quality independent advice and warning of significant risks;

to ensure greater value and coherence of independent oversight providers' work; and to improve and modernise the work of my Office.

### Enhancement

I would like to highlight my Office's work in the period thematically.

First, our work to enhance how we operate. During the reporting period, the Investigation Service received its periodic quality assurance peer review report; in this case undertaken by investigation specialists from the United Nations Development Programme. Their conclusion that *'the Investigation Service is overall an effective service'* is testament to the professionalisation and strengthened independence of the Service in the past few years. The report also makes some helpful recommendations for enhancement, to which I have responded with an action plan, endorsed by the High Commissioner. Where possible, recommendations have already been implemented.

My Office has continued to strengthen its field presence in order to be closer to the persons we serve and to address matters more responsively, whilst maintaining our independence and unity. In addition to Bangkok, Nairobi and Pretoria, we have created an office in Amman with the intention to establish a digital and forensic hub to deliver our 'digital by default' approach.

### Oversight co-ordination

*Your Excellencies*, I would like to turn to my second theme, oversight co-ordination.

*The Policy on Independent Oversight* provides a role for my Office to coordinate the work of all independent oversight providers. We do this through various means, including the issuance of management implication reports for management attention; and through analysis of key independent oversight providers' data.

Strategic Oversight's role is to: cohere; comprehend; consolidate; co-ordinate; and finally contribute, independent oversight assurance work. I am reviewing the structure of the IGO, including Strategic Oversight, to enable it to more fully deliver on this remit.

### Working in partnership

*Your Excellencies*, I would like to come to my third theme, working in partnership.

By definition, any non-executive, independent function must work in partnership. Our partnership with UNHCR's management team is both productive and mutually supportive.

We continue to facilitate the independent oversight system in UNHCR. We support the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee; liaise between the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System and UNHCR; and facilitate the work of UNHCR's internal audit service, provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

We work across UNHCR, specifically: the Division of Human Resources and Legal Affairs Service over disciplinary matters arising from our investigations work; the Ethics and Ombudsperson's offices and Field Security Service for dispute resolution and witness protection; the Implementation Management and Assurance Service on partner fraud and integrity issues; and the Senior Coordinator for SEA and SH for our work to deliver on UNHCR's zero tolerance policy.

### COVID-19 response

*Your Excellencies*, by any measure this has been an exceptional period of change and perturbation. My Office has not been immune to these impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work and think. My Office continues to adapt well to the new restrictions imposed across the world. Despite implementation of innovative approaches, some activities do require physical intervention, and, as a consequence, will be on hold until travel permits.

The pandemic required all of UNHCR's independent oversight providers to review and refresh their plans for 2020; which we co-ordinated. A revised plan including agile and innovative responses was agreed with UNHCR's management team.

We have also developed an enhanced oversight response in relation to the increased fraud risks presented by the pandemic. This work being delivered by the IGO, comprising proactive fraud risk and data review.

## Investigations work

*Distinguished delegates*, I now turn to my Office's investigations work.

The demand on the Service continues to be high. We have continued to prioritise our work, treating sexual misconduct cases with the highest priority, alongside financial and resettlement fraud. In the reporting period, my Office received over 1,100 complaints of misconduct, a 10 per cent decrease compared to the previous reporting period. We think this is an impact of the first few months of the pandemic. The level of complaints is recovering currently.

During the reporting period, we substantiated 56 cases implicating UNHCR personnel referred these for disciplinary action. The High Commissioner imposed disciplinary measures on 28 UNHCR staff members, 18 of whom were dismissed or separated.

I have commissioned a review of our case data in order to improve our understanding of the drivers and factors affecting our caseload. We also continue to support implementing partners to enhance their response capacity; including support for the development of a SEA e-learning training package for implementing partner investigators, in the context of the High Commissioner's IASC Championship on Protection from SEA and SH.

## Conclusion

In closing, *Distinguished Delegates*, I would like to express my deep appreciation for your strong interest and support in my Office's work. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has presented some challenges for my Office, I am pleased that my team has stood and delivered. The pandemic also presents a real opportunity for me and my Office to challenge what we do, and how we do it.

I look forward to working with you all throughout my tenure, keeping accountability and transparency at the core of my mission.

*Thank you.*