

Introductory Remarks of Steven Corliss
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Update on Global Strategic Priorities (EC/64/SC/CRP.13)
57th meeting of the Standing Committee

26 June 2013

Thank you, Madame Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentleman,

I am pleased to appear before this 57th meeting of the Standing Committee to introduce Conference Room Paper 13, which provides an update on UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities. Together with me on the podium is Mr. Henrik Nordentoft, the Deputy Director of the Division of Programme Support & Management (DPSM), who coordinates the Global Strategic Priorities management team at Headquarters.

The Global Strategic Priorities – or GSPs, as we call them – represent important areas where UNHCR is making concerted efforts through its operations to strengthen protection, improve the quality of life and seek solutions for refugees or other people of concern or otherwise bring our programmes into line with the international standards that we advocate. The Operational GSPs are complemented by a separate set of Support and Management GSPs, which represent commitments to improving UNHCR's organizational effectiveness in key areas ranging from protection and results-based management to financial accountability, emergency response and humanitarian coordination.

UNHCR first introduced the Global Strategic Priorities for the 2010–2011 biennium programme. In March last year, during the 53rd meeting of the Standing Committee, I spoke of four key lessons that UNHCR had learned from implementation of the 2010–2011 GSPs. First, we recognized the need to make the GSP process more focused and manageable. Second, we saw the importance of creating an increased sense of ownership for the GSPs at all levels of the organization, but most importantly in the field operations. Third, we needed to ensure strong and continuing management of the GSP process internally. Fourth and finally, we had to find a better way to present the results of UNHCR's performance in relation to the GSPs.

We have taken these four lessons on board fully during implementation of UNHCR's 2012–2013 biennium programme. Streamlining the GSPs and reducing the number of impact indicators from 96 to 15 has indeed provided greater focus and has made the process more manageable. Field operations have also selected the GSP indicators they consider to be most relevant to their operation, which has increased the sense of ownership and commitment. Management of the GSP process has been strengthened considerably, with DPSM and the Division of International Protection jointly coordinating a GSP Management Team that engages all relevant stakeholders at Headquarters, technical experts and the Regional Bureaux.

We believe that reporting on the Global Strategic Priorities has also been enhanced through the "Global Engagements" approach. For the 2010–2011 biennium, UNHCR only reported on operations that had successfully reached an established standard or target, such as the provision of twenty litres of potable water per person per day. The Global Engagements are based upon reporting from all operations that have prioritized activities related to the GSP impact indicators, allowing us to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced view of UNHCR's performance.

Madame Chairperson,

UNHCR has provided a progress report on the 2012—2013 GSPs, which is found in Annexes 1 and 2 of Conference Room Paper 13. Last week, UNHCR released the 2012 Global Report, which is available to you on the UNHCR website (www.unhcr.org). Overall, we have reason to be encouraged by the progress achieved during the first half of the biennium. UNHCR has made advances in many GSP areas, sometimes even exceeding the targets set at the country level, and has seen a tangible difference in the lives of many people of concern. At the same time, we consider it important not to gloss over the ongoing challenges that we are facing in a number of operations.

The Global Report shares more analysis, more detail and specific examples highlighting where we are making progress and, importantly, where we are not. The Report provides brief, illustrative case studies from field operations, which not only provide the GSP results in quantitative terms but also explain how we are succeeding in some country operations and why we are not in others.

Let me offer an example:

- Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in the Dollo Ado camps in Ethiopia improved dramatically during 2012, following intensive and targeted nutrition interventions. The GAM rates remain above acceptable levels, ranging between 12 and 16 percent in all camps, except for Buramino, which remains stubbornly high at 32 percent. Here, I would note that the Global Engagements approach allows us to update you on the progress we are achieving in Dollo Ado, even as we work to bring GAM levels below the 10 percent threshold.
- The Global Report also highlights the very poor nutritional status of refugees in the Sherkole and Tongo camps in Western Ethiopia, explaining that many arrived in a poor nutritional state and were also forced to exchange food rations for clothing and firewood, as they had left everything behind. Again, we are committed to sharing with you both the good and bad news regarding our GSP performance.

The 2012 GSP results are a key input for UNHCR's programme planning process. Operations managers in the field have drawn upon GSP reporting to refine and adjust implementation in 2013 and to inform planning for the 2014—2015 biennium. At Headquarters, the GSP results are an important "lens" for reviewing and approving operations plans submitted by the field. DPSM's technical specialists are reviewing performance and progress in the GSP areas under their responsibility. They will be making further recommendations regarding planning and budgeting decisions for 2014, leading up to the preparation of detailed plans in November, and will also use this information to guide their own work planning, including for support missions to the field.

Progress on the Global Strategic Priorities depends upon a range of factors, not all of which are within UNHCR's ability to control. For example, UNHCR plays an important but necessarily limited role in promoting the enactment of new legislation on refugees, internal displacement and statelessness. In other situations, a new influx can bring thousands of refugees into an existing population, often in a weakened state, dramatically changing the baseline situation. Deteriorating security conditions may interfere with access and prevent UNHCR from achieving targets, as was the case in Syria where resettlement submissions fell by almost 75 percent.

In emergencies, UNHCR operations managers may have to urgently reallocate available resources toward meeting critical, life saving needs. This can effectively place different GSP areas – say, nutrition and durable solutions – into competition with each other. Resources will continue to be a key constraint. While UNHCR's expenditure levels have never been higher, funding for many stable operations remains static or is even decreasing, constraining progress on the GSPs.

Madam Chairperson,

We have also reported results on the 2012 Support and Management GSPs. Let me provide a few highlights. Last year, UNHCR undertook focused initiatives to strengthen our capacities in the areas of protection, programme and financial management. UNHCR also issued IPSAS-compliant financial statements for 2012 and established the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC), fulfilling two important GSP commitments. During the year, UNHCR worked toward more effective humanitarian coordination by engaging actively with the Transformative Agenda and significantly strengthening our leadership role within the global Protection, Shelter and Camp Coordination and Camp Management clusters. Throughout 2012, UNHCR was also called upon to demonstrate its preparedness to respond to emergencies across Africa and in the Syria situation.

Turning now to the Global Strategic Priorities for the 2014—2015 biennium, I would begin by thanking the Standing Committee for the input and advice provided during the Informal Consultative Meeting held in February.

The High Commissioner launched the review the Global Strategic Priorities through consultations with the UNHCR senior management team. These discussions confirmed that 2012—2013 GSPs – which were carefully identified through broad consultations – remained of critical relevance. The High Commissioner also observed that sustained engagement and a degree of continuity over several years would be needed to achieve results in the GSP areas. For this reason, he called for a level of discipline when considering changes to the GSPs for the coming biennium.

We also carefully analyzed our experience working with the 2012—2013 GSPs during the first year of implementation and sought to draw lessons and identify areas for improvement. The Informal Consultative Meeting drew our attention to several areas where the GSPs could be expanded or reinforced, which we have taken into consideration. For example, the 2013—2014 framework incorporates a new GSP focusing on coexistence with hosting communities and a new indicator on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and not only support to survivors. At the same time, the ICM discussions also provided significant support for the goals of keeping the GSPs focused and manageable and maintaining continuity.

Following this consultative process, the High Commissioner issued the 2014—2015 Global Strategic Priorities at the beginning of March, and they have guided the development and review of operational plans for the coming biennium.

We consider it important to highlight the distinction between UNHCR's Global Strategic Priorities and the twenty selected impact indicators included within the framework. We consider that the GSP impact indicators provide important insight into how UNHCR is performing within the GSP areas, which are much broader. UNHCR's institutional commitment, however, is to pursuing the Global Strategic Priorities in a full and comprehensive way. Field operations are expected to shape their planning according to the GSPs, select relevant impact indicators – whether or not they are part of the GSP framework – setting baselines and targets and reporting on their progress.

Madame Chairperson,

We would now look forward to hearing the views and responding to the comments and questions of the Standing Committee.

Thank you.