

64th Meeting of the Standing Committee

Staff Security EC/66/SC/CRP.24

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Introductory Statement of Ms. Terry Morel,

Director, Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS)

Final Draft (check against delivery)

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

since I last presented to you on security in March 2014, it is unfortunate that we have to recognise that we are working on a daily basis in more increasingly complex environments and in more countries where different armed groups consider UN staff and humanitarian workers as legitimate targets. As a result, our international humanitarian system is being seriously tested. Nonetheless, our goal remains to stay and deliver for those in need of protection and assistance while ensuring the safety and security of its staff.

We continue to face security challenges in Syria, Iraq and Somalia crises as well as in more recent emergencies in Nigeria and Yemen. Burundi. Meanwhile, UNHCR continues to contend with highly insecure environments in

South Sudan, Afghanistan, Central African Republic and even Ukraine. These critical situations underscore the tremendous risks faced by humanitarian workers, especially locally recruited staff who try to deliver much needed protection assistance and may be targeted within the communities they live. Therefore, managing the perceptions of what we do and ensuring our impartiality is a major component of our security work.

In Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, our national staff and their families continue to be impacted by mortar fire and bombings. In April 2014, in Dadaab, Kenya, one of our local security assistants was shot and wounded during the attempted abduction of an international staff member. In May 2014, a driver in Central African Republic was abducted and killed while other staff were threatened and fled their homes. One international staff member was killed while on leave in his home country of Burkina Faso during sudden unrest; 27 staff have reported that they underwent immediate medical treatment for injuries received in incidents but the figure may be considerably higher with more than 253 security incidents recorded in 2014. To date for 2015, 162 security incidents were reported. In addition, 22 staff members were injured in 14 road traffic crashes in 2014.

With this as background, let me present the achievements that have been obtained to strengthen the Staff Security within UNHCR through the organization's action plan for security management, focusing on strengthening

the culture of security 2015 – 2017 “An updated plan of action.” It includes ongoing analysis of factors affecting the security environment, implementing appropriate measures to address risks, and engaging in close cooperation with partners, especially host governments who have primary responsibility for ensuring safety of UN personnel.

Firstly, advice and support is provided to UNHCR managers through Field Safety Advisors who contribute to identifying threats to both personnel and persons of concern and work closely with our teams to develop mitigation measures and contingency plans that will enable continued delivery. Our Field Safety Advisors work closely with both personnel from the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the host government security forces. We have our own dedicated security engineering specialist, whose services are in high demand, given the continued threat in some locations to UN premises from explosives and other weaponry attacks.

Secondly, UNHCR continues to build a diverse security workforce that can meet the demands of its increasingly complex operational context. Given the overall increase in personnel and continuing rise in number of field offices to reach persons of concern, many of which are in challenging security environments, the number of Field Safety Advisors has risen to 70 international and about 170 locally recruited Field Safety Advisers. The vast majority of FSAs are concentrated in areas with the most significant security threats and

risks primarily in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. A small number of FSAs are assigned to cover a geographic region, to act as surge capacity in emergencies, or to coordinate security response from headquarters. Our FSAs also play a core role in establishing security mechanisms for the wider humanitarian community especially our INGO partners, as we have done for example in refugee camps Jordan under the auspices of the Saving Lives Together concept.

Awareness training is a key aspect of managing security at all levels. In the past year, over 200 managers have attended specialized risk management training. Training is organized for certain categories of staff such as drivers, who are exposed to particular risk as a function of their job. Recently, there was a pilot program offering practical training for women on averting and responding to attacks.

Fourth, given the number of staff and third parties impacted by road traffic crashes, the organization in line with the United Nations Decade of Action on Road Safety launched a Safe Road Use campaign, to promote safe driving and to reduce the number and impact of road crashes involving staff and other road users.

Fifth, with the security concerns increasing in many parts of the world, the organization must continually assess the level of risk and ensure corporate

accountability to support our field teams. This is done through a Security Steering Committee chaired by the High Commissioner or Assistant High Commissioner for Operations.

The organization continues to further improve and systematize internal security procedures. For example, a number of administrative instructions related to the management of critical incidents and developing situations with high-risk are under final review and will be issued shortly.

UNHCR also works within the inter-agency security management framework that establishes policy for United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. DESS/FSS engages with UNDSS and other members of the Inter Agency Security Management Network on policy issues to strengthen the system overall and ensure that UNHCR operational concerns are adequately reflected in policies and practices.

Before I conclude, I would like to share with you in more detail some of the dilemmas and complexities from two of our highest risk operations, Somalia and Yemen.

Somalia represents one of the most complicated operating environments for UNHCR. There has been a targeted and consistent trend of attacks against the UN. Following the attack on 19 June 2013 on the UN Common Compound in Mogadishu resulting eight deaths; on February 13 2014, a convoy of two

UNHCR vehicles was ambushed resulting in injuries to some staff and in April 2015 in Garowe, a targeted suicide attack killed four UNICEF staff and two others. A week later a second attack in Galkayo resulted in minor injuries to a UNHCR staff member. The consistent pattern of attacks against the UN has made it extremely difficult for UN and humanitarian staff to operate. Premises require the highest standards of protection against attacks. All movements outside these must be conducted in armoured vehicles with security escorts. Limited freedom of movement and the ever-present threat of attack create high tension and anxiety for staff, who must constantly remain vigilant for dangers to their and their colleagues' lives. Nevertheless UNHCR has continued to deliver, for example by responding this year to an inflow of Yemeni refugees fleeing conflict in their country, and by opening a new office in Kismayo to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees in Kenya.

Yemen is another example of a place where the UN and humanitarian workers have faced acute dilemmas as they seek to stay and deliver lifesaving protection and assistance for those in need. There UNHCR provides protection and assistance to both refugee and IDPs, and as conflict there has increased has expanded its programmes to reach newly internally displaced Yemenis as well. This has become increasingly difficult as conflict has worsened. Daily bombardment in the capital city Sana'a and elsewhere is a constant threat,

especially to national staff who are exposed in their homes. Incidents affecting the humanitarian community have increased, including the killing on 02 September 2014 of two ICRC staff members at a checkpoint in Amran. Should a sudden deterioration occur international staff in the capital have only one means of evacuation, the international airport, which could be cut off without warning. The UN has faced the challenge of carefully balancing needs of populations of concern and safety of staff as well as the challenges related to perception, taking all possible precautions including active channels of dialogue with all parties and firm adherence to humanitarian principles of neutrality, UNHCR continues to operate with a core team of essential staff in the capital, and is working to establish hubs in the field, where it can assure lifesaving activities for those in need.

Communicating with communities in our work and getting their feedback is a critical part of our protection work and our efforts to manage security.

In conclusion, UNHCR remains committed to staying and delivering in challenging security environments while ensuring that that appropriate risk mitigation measures and security procedures are in place. This is necessary to ensure that people in need receive critical lifesaving protection and assistance, while also ensuring the safety and well-being of our staff and partners.

Adequate resources are essential, as is a properly prepared and trained workforce and close cooperation with partners working toward our safety. In this context the sustained engagement and support from all stakeholders is more important than ever.

I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to you, host countries, donors and member states who continue to provide us with such strong and consistent support for our staff security.