

Remarks for the 85th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Agenda item 4(c) – Oral Update on Integrity
20 September 2022

Mister Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

You may have heard that last week, the High Commissioner's Representatives, posted to countries across the globe, were in Geneva for a Global Representatives Meeting, the first in 4 years. It was a rare opportunity to share experiences and look back – on lessons from COVID 19, on the impact of the Global Compact on Refugees – but more than that to look ahead. To think about what the future holds for the people that UNHCR serves, and how we can better serve them. To ask what is expected from the assembled UNHCR leadership. To grapple with what leadership means in an organization that works in the complex humanitarian settings that we do.

Leadership is key to make our organisation run well. Good leadership recognizes that while taking risks is inherent to the work that we do, we will be judged, and we judge ourselves by our ability to live up to the highest standards of integrity. Judged by our ability to set a healthy working environment for our 19,000 strong workforce and ensuring our programmes are designed and implemented in a risk informed manner.

Our proactive approach to reinforcing the organisation's culture of integrity has been outlined in the last three years through the Standing Committee's Oral Update on Integrity. We're seeing a convergence of efforts and of systems to strengthen the identification and prevention of all forms of misconduct, fraud and corruption. And while we recognize that risk can never be fully eliminated, we continue to invest in risk mitigating measures. Starting with our focus on ensuring all colleagues work together to foster and maintain a positive and healthy workplace culture. On providing both the space to take necessary action, sometimes risky action, and to report misconduct when the line of integrity is crossed.

The presentation of efforts by the Ethics Office, the Ombudsman, Enterprise Risk Management, and the Office of the Senior Coordinator for Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment provides a snapshot of these efforts, and our linked-up approach. And these efforts in turn complement those of others across the organisation: individuals such as our representatives; our extensive topical networks such as risk focal points and peer advisors; and organisational entities such as the Division of Human Resources, the Legal Affairs Service, and the Inspector General.

You will have seen background information presented for this session so I won't go over those details again, but do want to highlight a few key elements. First of all, stepped up communication on support to personnel on workplace concerns, and the creation of the Support Desk, were part of a significant effort to provide a unified point of entry for colleagues and support them in identifying options available to address grievances. This is critical for our many colleagues based in remote and at times isolated duty stations.

Secondly, the deployment of dedicated capacity to prevent and response to sexual abuse and exploitation at the onset of the Ukraine emergency response offers a blueprint for future operations. This may not be needed in all instances, but when risks related to sexual abuse and exploitation are as high as we saw in the initial days of the exodus from Ukraine, dedicated focus on prevention and response to sexual abuse and exploitation will go some way to mitigating those risks for displaced populations.

And finally, fostering and maintaining a culture of dialogue also requires that we invest further in informal conflict resolution mechanisms. Because formal processes - blunt instruments that they are - are only truly needed in the most extreme of cases and many day-to-day disagreements and conflicts can and should be resolved through dialogue and open communication.

Distinguished delegates,

I am happy to be joined on the podium today by the Director of the Ethics Office, the Ombudsman and Mediator, the Chief Risk Officer and the Senior Coordinator for Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment. These colleagues, together with the Inspector General, the Director of the Division of Human Resources and the General Counsel are in the room today as resource persons. They are an incredible team and bring a diverse and complementary set of perspectives and experiences in support of efforts to reinforce the organisation's culture of integrity.

I am immensely proud of this team and the dedication of colleagues serving all over the world, including in dangerous and complex environments, to continue together to strengthen this organization.

Thank you.