

## **DESS Presentation to the Standing Committee**

**(7 July 2021)**

### **Introduction**

*Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,*

I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide you with a brief update on efforts UNHCR is taking with respect to emergency preparedness, response, and supply as well as security of the workforce and its operations.

Let me start by recognizing that the past year has been difficult for everyone, and perhaps most impactful on those who were forced to flee their homes. COVID-19 border closures, movement restrictions, and concomitant dramatic socio-economic deteriorations brought severe consequences on the protection environment of UNHCR's people of concern, and their host communities. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, the emergencies of increasingly multi-hazard nature such as those most recently unfolding in Ethiopia, Mozambique, DRC, or Myanmar continued, leading to further aggravation of the humanitarian needs and new displacement within the countries and across international borders.

While we have been fortunate not to have casualties or more serious injuries as a result of security incidents, we continue to operate in high risk locations. The recent attack on the humanitarian demining team HALO Trust in Afghanistan or the killing of MSF colleagues in Tigray remind us all of the volatile and fragile security environment that we are confronted with, where the nexus of staff safety and health also played a paramount role in duty of care considerations.

### **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic**

*Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,*

COVID-19 pandemic impacted global emergency responses. Notwithstanding, UNHCR quickly adapted to the new circumstances. We declared an internal L2 global emergency on 27 March 2020, giving operations additional flexibility to select partners, expedite procurement and request additional staff and supplies.

Despite the challenges, UNHCR deployed 319 emergency staff and partners during 2020. Some deployments commenced through remote working arrangements until travel was possible. Several emergency rosters were renewed and pre-deployment preparations were conducted virtually. With the introduction of a new on-line emergency training module, we trained more than 80 new roster members. Similarly, the Security Management Learning Programme (a mandatory training for managers in high risk locations) and training for Field Security Advisors have been delivered through e-learning methodologies. Furthermore, applied innovative technologies in supply training through development of game-based learning, putting supply staff in a simulated humanitarian aid response in DRC.

Potential deployees were medically checked and offered guidance on how to be COVID vigilant, even in emergency settings. We advised staff on how to protect themselves, their colleagues and people of concern against COVID-19. Despite these efforts, some colleagues deployed to emergency operations were infected, and one colleague regrettably passed away.

### **Emergency preparedness and response – partnering Regional Bureaux and operations**

*Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,*

Effective emergency responses lie in robust preparedness. In this regard, UNHCR has significantly invested and placed emphasis on our preparedness actions in anticipation of new emergencies, while seeking ways to simplify its processes. Emergency preparedness has now become an integral part of risk management and situational analysis and is being streamlined in other annual work processes, rather than done in parallel. We are planning to consolidate “Preparedness Package for Refugees” (PPRE) and the “Preparedness Packages for internal Displacement” (PPIE) and include the relevant preparedness actions for population displacement as a consequence of disaster, including those induced by climate change.

Harnessing work done across HQ entities, our division is also bringing together security threat and political analysis, meteorological and other phenomena to better anticipate and forecast population displacement risks, incorporating climate change aspects. While High Alert List for Emergency Preparedness (HALEP) will be maintained, the new platform will increase the visibility of the early warning products for timely decision-making and inform our inter-agency cooperation on emergency preparedness.

Secondly, to further empower the Regional Bureaux to manage emergency responses, DESS will partner with interested Bureaux on building the field-based mechanism tailored to specific regional needs (e.g. specific language requirements). This complements the centrally-administered global rosters such as the Emergency Response Team (ERT) roster, which will remain the agency’s principal instrument to mobilize high-capacity staff to emergencies. UNHCR now established its first ever inter-agency coordination roster and added several specific functional ones such as the information management roster.

Thirdly, we will continue to provide technical support and guidance to the Regional Bureaux and field operations for actionable and inclusive contingency planning for new or escalated emergencies.

On climate change, following on the outcomes of the evaluation of UNHCR’s L3 Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai issued in February 2021, we are looking to better clarify preparing and responding to population displacement as a result of disasters, including disasters caused by climate change. The Emergency Policy, valid until mid-2022, will also be updated as scheduled, incorporating the relevant elements linked to the Climate Action Strategic Framework.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I cannot emphasize enough how building and fostering partnerships at international, regional and local level is vital for UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response. Just to give you an example: at the height of the influx of Ethiopian refugees to Sudan in November 2020, UNHCR dispatched 12 airlifts with critical assistance, some of which were generously funded by the International Humanitarian City (IHC) in Dubai. The International Humanitarian Partners' (IHP) contributed with the establishment of fully functional base camps for UNHCR staff and its partners in eastern Sudan, while 35 stand-by partners' employees provided targeted expert support for the operation.

### **Streamlined and agile supply processes**

*Distinguished delegates,*

Anticipation, fluidity, and agility are the main drivers towards UNHCR's supply excellence. Along with the regionalization process, we are reviewing supply activities through four lenses:

- a clear distinction between strategic, technical, and operational activities within supply and how they map to the global – regional – local geographic scope of supply teams;
- analysis of supply complexity and resources across UNHCR's operations, with a goal to support the Bureaux and operations to build optimal structures;
- financial efficiencies, including economies of scale and scope in both procurement and logistics, to determine what goods and services are best placed at either global, regional or local level;
- environmental sustainability, including greening the content and lifecycle impact of goods procured and used or distributed by UNHCR, as well as the reducing CO2 emissions caused by transportation and storage activities.

These analyses will help define the future design of supply chain management as part of the new enterprise resource planning system (Cloud ERP) with an aim to obtain a streamlined, agile and simplified supply processes. Revised Procurement Policy and its Administrative Instruction launched in May 2021 have further clarified procurement processes in the decentralized operational context.

### **Managing workforce and operations in a secure manner**

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Working in situations where armed conflict prevail requires a continuous review of security strategies and measures. With the roll out of the revised Security Management Policy for UNHCR in late 2020, we have continued to ensure managers understand and are aware of their responsibilities at all levels of the organization. The Security Steering Committee led by the Assistant High Commissioner Operations remains a key mechanism to review the operating posture and security measures for operations where the security risk is high. In 2020 fourteen meetings were conducted. As part of security preparedness, oversight continues through the annual compliance review to ensure security measures are in place for all offices, while the Regional Security Coordinator supporting the Bureau Directors are very much

involved in ensuring that security planning is addressed from the outset particularly in support of emergency operations.

In 2020 the Office of Internal Oversight Services audited UNHCR's strategic security management, and made five recommendations to strengthen UNHCR's culture of security. In June 2021, noting significant progress achieved, it indicated it would close all recommendations as implemented.

The organization remains committed to reducing road crashes and, implementing the UN Road Safety Strategy. A number of activities were rolled out for the Road Safety week in May, including road safety and driver training; and use of technology to monitor driver performance.

We are actively engaged with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security, the UN Security Management system and other humanitarian agencies to support security management structures in the field both on operational issues and challenges that require support, to strengthen policy and guidance determining technical solutions for efficiencies and to reduce risk. These include work related to security applications, communications, physical security and technology.

I am glad to report that significant improvements were made to increase the number of women among the security workforce. As part of the organizations 'Plan of Action for security 2021 – 23' we have set a target of 50% of new candidates for security positions to be women. In 2020 UNHCR recruited four female field security officers, and in 2021 to date, there have been three women in the process of recruitment. In so doing the organization has increased the proportion of women in the international security workforce from 8% to 15%.

Lastly, allow me to highlight the efforts we are taking to ensure that security risk management processes and measures support the diverse workforce of the organization through focusing on personal risk profiles. Adopting a more person-centered approach may only serve to strengthen the organizations objectives to have a more inclusive and diverse workforce who will ultimately be better placed to support persons of concern to the organization.

Thank you very much for your attention and support. I will be happy to answer your questions.