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## Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Sixty-third session

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee**

## **Report of the fifty-third meeting of the Standing Committee (13-15 March 2012)**

**Report of the Secretariat**

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Jan Knutsson (Sweden) chaired the three-day meeting.

## **II. Adoption of the agenda of the 53th meeting and of the 2012 work programme**

2. The agenda for the meeting (EC/63/SC/CRP.1) was adopted without comment.

3. Regarding the 2012 work programme, the Chairman proposed that it be adopted on the understanding that the list of items for the June Standing Committee under the theme of international protection might need to be amended, depending on the outcome of the discussions on the Executive Committee conclusions process. The 2012 work programme was adopted on this basis. UNHCR was reminded to provide conference documents at least three weeks in advance of Standing Committee meetings in order for Member States to have sufficient time to prepare for discussions and to be in a position to adopt decisions put before the Committee.

## **III. Regional activities and global programmes**

### **A. Strategic presentations**

4. In her introduction the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) highlighted the challenge UNHCR faced in terms of responding to a number of successive emergencies, while at the same time, working to find comprehensive solutions for ongoing operations. She noted that solutions for protracted situations were often themselves protracted and that it was important to continue to make steady progress, while safeguarding protection space.

#### **(a) Africa**

5. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa highlighted a number of key operational challenges over the past year which required UNHCR to scale up its emergency response at very short notice and re-direct resources, and updated the Committee on progress being made with respect to comprehensive durable solutions. He commended the “great service” of host countries in admitting and caring for refugees on their territories, and underlined the importance of predictable and adequate resourcing to allow the Office to meet its operational objectives.

6. Echoing the words of the Director, there was broad recognition among Member States of the important contribution of host countries in Africa, particularly those with large refugee populations. Delegations expressed support for the Office’s efforts to bring about durable solutions and welcomed local integration as a viable option. At the same time, UNHCR was encouraged to promote voluntary repatriation as the preferred durable solution, particularly in relation to the Somali refugee situation. It was noted that 2012 marked the Dadaab refugee camp’s 20<sup>th</sup> year of existence and that this year presented a unique opportunity to find lasting solutions to the situation.

7. The situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, South Sudan and Sudan, also received much attention during the discussion. The need to avoid creating statelessness in relation to Sudan and South Sudan was raised by a number of delegations. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) was also mentioned as a key concern. The

transitional solutions initiative was endorsed by a great number of participants, who suggested that refugee-oriented development assistance become part and parcel of the entire development agenda.

8. Member States expressed dismay regarding the attack on the UN building in Abuja, Nigeria last year, and concern for the security of humanitarian workers in general. Delegations welcomed the comments made by the Director regarding a security solution that involved refugees and hosting populations, who can play a constructive role in addressing their own security concerns.

9. While continued financial support was needed, the Director pointed out that not less than 50 per cent of all operational resources of the Office go to the Africa region. He noted the importance of accountability and assured governments that UNHCR would continue to work to demonstrate results in relation to the resources received. In response to a comment made by a representative of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) present at the meeting, the Director acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve communication with refugees, particularly in the context of comprehensive solutions. Regarding the transitional solutions initiative, he was pleased by the strong support received so far and stressed the importance of demonstrating critical results by the end of the year.

**(b) Asia and the Pacific**

10. The Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific observed that the absence of major new emergencies in his region in 2011 (with the exception of natural disasters) had enabled UNHCR to consolidate key initiatives and devote available resources to advancing three key priorities: finding solutions for protracted situations; safeguarding humanitarian and asylum space, including in the mixed migration context; and improving asylum conditions for people of concern in urban situations. He also paid tribute to three colleagues killed in the attack on the UNHCR compound in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in November 2011.

11. Delegations welcomed the innovative quadripartite dialogue between UNHCR, Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan which resulted in the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries* and the upcoming international conference on the subject taking place in Geneva in May 2012. While putting every possible effort into this important initiative, UNHCR and its partners were encouraged to not overlook the continuing needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan.

12. There was continued concern about the difficult operating environment and shrinking humanitarian space for the protection of IDPs in a number of other protracted situations, including Sri Lanka. Efforts to resolve the situation of refugees from Bhutan in Nepal provided a good example of the strategic use of resettlement, supported by the Core Group of Resettlement Countries. At the same time, the Office was encouraged to take all durable solutions into consideration, including the pursuit of a dialogue between the States concerned on voluntary repatriation for the remaining population. There was general consensus that the challenges of meeting the humanitarian needs of and developing durable solutions for people displaced from Myanmar in several countries in the region would require a comprehensive regional approach, in collaboration with a number of actors.

13. A number of delegations welcomed the anticipated opening of a Regional Support Office in Bangkok whose role would be to coordinate practical implementation of the principles agreed upon at the Bali Process Ministerial Conference in March 2011 under the

Regional Cooperation Framework. In the face of growing pressures of irregular migration in the Asia-Pacific region, this framework was designed to help ensure predictable and systematic responses to regional challenges.

14. The Director acknowledged the generosity and support of hosting States in providing hospitality and preserving asylum space despite asylum fatigue and competing domestic demands. With regard to the issue of mixed migration, he observed that in the absence of a legal framework, in order to build the capacity of States in the region to differentiate between migrants and those needing protection and avoid abuse of the asylum system, it was important for UNHCR to have clearly defined national counterparts. In response to the comments regarding IDPs in Afghanistan, he noted that this was an inter-agency responsibility to which UNHCR would contribute with the consent of the authorities and if resources were available.

**(c) Europe**

15. The Director of the Bureau for Europe presented a summary of UNHCR's strategic priorities in the region for 2012 related to: access to territory and asylum procedures; fair and efficient asylum procedures; durable solutions for refugees and IDPs; and the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

16. The commitment of European Union States to establishing a solid protection space that would provide fair treatment in a uniform manner was reaffirmed. Support was expressed for the Common European Asylum System and newly established European Asylum Support Office in this regard. The considerable pressure on European countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea was noted. Beyond the continent, the European Union was working in collaboration with UNHCR to build up the protection capacities of countries of origin and transit, as well as to contribute to refugee resettlement which would be the focus of a Joint EU Resettlement Programme scheduled for adoption in 2012.

17. In relation to the Balkans region, the establishment of the Regional Programme on Durable Solutions for Refugees and Displaced Persons and the signing of a Joint Ministerial Declaration in Belgrade in November 2011 were welcome developments in resolving this longstanding displacement situation. Appreciation of UNHCR's role in facilitating this process was noted, and it was hoped that strong financial support for implementation of the programme would be confirmed at an upcoming donor conference in Sarajevo.

18. The Director reaffirmed UNHCR's commitment to pursuing durable solutions for protracted situations of displacement in Europe. He expressed appreciation for the support of Croatia in hosting a Conference on issues related to statelessness, notably with regard to Roma people, which resulted in the Zagreb Declaration and the identification of measures to counter problems of documentation and registration in south-eastern Europe.

**(d) The Middle East and North Africa**

19. The Director of the Bureau observed that the unprecedented changes witnessed in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa during the past year posed both challenges and opportunities. He noted in particular, UNHCR's efforts to strengthen coordination with governments in the region, regional organizations (including the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)), national partners and civil society, in order to safeguard the existing protection space and expand it where possible.

20. Member States commended UNHCR's efficient response during the Libya crisis last year and to the current outflow of Malian refugees. The Office's ongoing relief efforts in Yemen, despite instability in the country, were also appreciated. Delegations took note of the appeal for financial support made by UNHCR and the Yemeni delegation. UNHCR's

enhanced programming on behalf of Iraqi IDPs and refugees in the region was welcomed. Concern was expressed about the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and the lack of access to populations in need of assistance. The efforts of neighbouring countries hosting Syrians who fled the country, and the appointment by the High Commissioner of a Regional Refugee Coordinator, was commended. Several Member States urged UNHCR to ensure a coordinated response.

21. One delegation welcomed the continuation of UNHCR's protection and assistance programmes for Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps in Algeria. Another delegation insisted on the fundamental nature of the registration of populations in the Tindouf camps and reiterated its request for authorizing UNHCR to undertake a census of these populations in order to reinforce their international protection.

22. The Director reassured the Committee that UNHCR was working with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other humanitarian actors to address the Syria situation. He highlighted that OCHA was coordinating the UN response inside the country while UNHCR was responsible for the refugee operations. He observed that much work remained to be done in Libya and called upon Member States to support the formalization of UNHCR's presence and activities in the country. Regarding Yemen, he noted that despite the internal situation in the country, the Government continued to apply an open-door policy for refugees arriving at the borders.

23. Noting that the majority of refugees of concern to UNHCR were either from or hosted by Muslim countries, the Director highlighted the importance of the upcoming OIC Ministerial Conference on Refugees in the Muslim World, which would take place in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan in May. In closing, he expressed appreciation for the generous support over the past year, noting in particular the contribution of host governments, which allowed UNHCR to respond to multiple emergencies.

**(e) Americas**

24. The Director of the Bureau noted that UNHCR's work in the Americas was guided by the global strategic priorities with particular focus on: 1) protection through advocacy, 2) the prevention and reduction of statelessness, 3) child protection and strengthening the Office's response to SGBV, 4) access to education, and 5) durable solutions. She also highlighted a number of positive advances in refugee protection in some Latin American countries.

25. The importance of cooperation between countries in the Americas and regional initiatives were highlighted by many speakers during the discussion. The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, the Mexico Plan of Action (including the solidarity resettlement initiative), and the Brasilia Declaration on the protection of refugees and stateless persons in the Americas, were important frameworks which allowed countries in the region to work on a regional level to provide protection and find solutions for displaced and stateless persons.

26. A number of countries in the region were putting in place important legislation and taking initiatives on statelessness; age, gender and diversity; SGBV; and the protection of unaccompanied and separated minors (UASC). The protocol for protecting, assisting and finding durable solutions for UASC adopted in Argentina was an example of good practice which could be replicated elsewhere. While it was true that many countries in the region were not party to the statelessness conventions, legal frameworks were being put in place in a number of countries to prevent and reduce statelessness. Support for introducing the transitional solutions initiative in Colombia was also expressed.

27. Acknowledging the validity of a comment made regarding low recognition rates, the Director assured delegations that UNHCR was working with governments in the region to build capacities for undertaking refugee status determination (RSD) with the goal of preserving protection space in the Americas. She mentioned a new quality assurance initiative which was being piloted in Mexico and Panama, and technical advice being given in the Caribbean, as examples of this work. UNHCR was asked to provide an overview of best practices related to RSD in the region which might be useful.

**(f) Global programmes and partnerships**

28. The Director of the Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM) introduced the strategic overview on global programmes and partnerships, focusing on four main areas: building results-based management (RBM) and the Office's capacity for evidence-based planning; strengthening the technical quality and integrity of operations; strategic partnerships; and new innovative strategies.

29. Delegations encouraged the Office to continue to develop its engagement in the inter-agency cluster approach and its capacity to contribute expertise to the Humanitarian Coordinator system. The Office was encouraged to coordinate with other actors including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization on reproductive health, and the latter on HIV, and to enhance partnerships with the private sector.

30. Several delegations called for more details on efforts to build technical quality and capacity in key areas such as education, information management, health, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, including how progress would be measured. Support was expressed for the transitional solutions initiative, however UNHCR was encouraged to consolidate lessons learned and put in place monitoring and evaluation tools to assess performance. The importance of age, gender and diversity mainstreaming and the protection of socially excluded groups was also raised.

31. While outlining the activities of the three UNHCR-led global clusters, the Director reassured the Committee that the Office remained committed to inter-agency coordination, including through the transformative agenda. He reaffirmed that the Office was engaged in building its own internal technical capacity, as well as that of its partners and beneficiaries at the local level. Responding to a number of comments made on the subject, he noted that UNHCR was playing its part in supporting the implementation of the decision on durable solutions adopted by the Secretary-General's Policy Committee, which provides a new approach for UN agencies and the World Bank to work together on common strategies to achieve solutions for IDPs and returning refugees.

**B. Staff safety and security issues, including refugee security**

32. The Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS) provided an update on progress made within the five areas of UNHCR's Security Management Plan of Action and Strategy for Implementation: field support; staffing; management, oversight and policy; security of persons of concern; and training.

33. The Committee paid tribute to staff that lost their lives in 2011 and expressed appreciation for UNHCR's ongoing work to establish a culture of security throughout the organization, welcoming in particular the development of the new Manual on Security for Persons of Concern. While commending the introduction of the Manual, a number of questions were raised, notably with regard to possible overlap with protection tools.

34. Several delegations asked for more information about UNHCR's collaboration with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and interaction with the Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN), in light of recent changes in the UN Security Management System. Questions included how these changes would affect implementing partners and NGOs, and the overall cost implications for the Office.

35. The Director spoke about the Office's need to adapt its security approach in relation to new threats, sometimes resulting in high costs in order to ensure compliance with the minimum operating security standards (MOSS). Regarding the Manual, he underlined that it was developed in close cooperation with the Division of International Protection, so as to ensure no overlap, and noted that UNHCR envisioned issuing an expanded, second edition in the future.

#### **IV. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources**

##### **A. Update on modernization/innovation and simplification**

36. The Deputy High Commissioner updated the Committee on areas where UNHCR was seeking ways to modernize, innovate and simplify its way of doing business. These included field-driven innovative projects; private-sector partnerships; a proposal to begin holding paperless meetings; and efforts to streamline and reduce reporting demands on the Field.

37. Overall, delegations welcomed the various initiatives being undertaken, in particular efforts to harness the creative potential of beneficiaries and local communities, and bring together staff, partners, including from the private sector, and academia, to enhance the lives of beneficiaries. UNHCR was asked for more information on concrete projects and implementation modalities, including costs and fundraising strategies, as well as on the actual impact of such initiatives. While commending efforts to streamline reporting and demands on the Field, the need to meet donor reporting requirements was also flagged.

38. The move to begin holding paperless meeting was generally accepted, on the understanding that for the time being, delegates could opt out and request documentation at the time of registration. At the same time, UNHCR was called upon to put in place user-friendly mechanisms to facilitate this initiative.

39. The Deputy High Commissioner assured delegations of UNHCR's commitment to ensuring the participatory nature of such innovative ventures, in broader consultation with all stakeholders including beneficiaries. He described as an example, efforts to promote self-reliance in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia, involving beneficiaries and in partnership with the private sector (the IKEA Foundation).

##### **B. Oral update on the establishment of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee**

40. Now that suitably qualified candidates had been selected to become members of UNHCR's Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC), delegations expressed satisfaction with the consultative nature of the process and hoped that the IAOC would meet in the near future to establish a timeline for its work, including keeping the Executive Committee abreast of its activities.



### **C. Follow-up to the recommendations of the Board of Auditors on the accounts for previous years**

41. The Controller and Director of the Division of Financial and Administrative Management (DFAM) gave a detailed update on UNHCR's follow-up to the recommendations of the Board of Auditors on the accounts for previous years, highlighting in particular the actions taken under the main risks areas in its report on the 2010 accounts: preparation of financial statements; financial management; progress toward the implementation of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS); performance reporting and progress towards implementation of results-based management; implementing partner management; and protracted refugee situations.

42. Delegations expressed appreciation for UNHCR's efforts to strengthen oversight. At the same time, they remained concerned about the number of outstanding recommendations and pointed out that in the context of a difficult financial environment for donors, assuring accountability was a prerequisite for funding. The Office was also commended on its work to establish a corporate risk management framework and asked to keep the Committee informed on the adoption and implementation of an enterprise risk management strategy. Delegations were interested in learning more about the Implementing Partner Management Service that had been established within DFAM and asked to receive regular updates on the inter-departmental working group on protracted refugee situations, coordinated by the Assistant High Commissioner (Protection).

43. Responding to a question about the benefits of IPSAS thus far, the Controller cited the ability to clearly recognize liabilities and assets, and to track inventory throughout the organization, as one concrete example. She also explained that additional human resources were being proposed to strengthen financial management in the Field across all regions, with Africa having the largest share because of the size of the operations there.

### **D. Oral update on the work of the Inspector General's Office**

44. The Inspector General provided a briefing on the work of his office, highlighting in particular efforts to ensure closer synergy among various oversight mechanisms. He also updated the Committee on the work of the Inspection Service and the Investigation Service.

45. Support was expressed for the work of the Inspector General's Office (IGO), which contributed to ensuring the effectiveness of the organization and safeguarding its reputation. Delegations called on UNHCR to undertake a thorough analysis of the pros and cons of the proposal to move the internal audit function in-house, and suggested that the IAOC look at this issue and make recommendations to the High Commissioner and to the Executive Committee. Delegations welcomed receiving regular updates on the work of the IGO, including through quarterly meetings of the "Friends of the IGO".

46. The Inspector General reassured delegations that the IAOC would look at the issue of the internal audit function and that the Executive Committee would be consulted prior to a decision being taken. Responding to a query about the membership of the "Friends of the IGO," he indicated that all Executive Committee members were welcome to join and participate in its meetings.

### **V. Programme budgets and funding**

47. The Controller and Director of DFAM provided an update on the financial situation in 2011. She also gave a brief overview of the 2012 annual budget, which was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2011, including adjustments made since then for

supplementary budgets. The acting Head of the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service then commented on UNHCR's funding situation in 2011 and projections for 2012, showing comparative positions in recent years in respect of fresh income versus budget; timing of pledges; earmarking trends; contributions by region; sources of funding; UN and pooled funding mechanisms; and private-sector fundraising income and investment.

48. Delegations remarked that with the adoption of the new budgeting system based on the global needs assessment (GNA), the funding gap has continued to grow, and called on UNHCR to diversify its funding sources and ensure funds were used in the most effective way. A number of questions were asked including whether UNHCR foresaw additional supplementary budgets in 2012 and whether security costs were segregated in the budget.

49. The acting Head of the Donor Relations and Resource Mobilization Service indicated that while no additional supplementary budgets were foreseen at this stage, this did not mean that there would not be more. She also clarified that security costs were segregated and firewalled in the budget, and assured the Committee that UNHCR was working on broadening its funding strategy. Regarding the funding gap, the impact on operations and details on the unmet needs would be the focus of the update at the 54<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee in June.

50. At the end of the agenda item, the Committee adopted a decision on budgets and funding in 2012 (Annex I).

## **VI. Programme/protection policy**

### **A. 2012-2013 Global Strategic Priorities**

51. The Director of the Division of Programme Support and Management (DPSM) updated the Committee on the rationale behind the new Global Strategic Priorities (GSPs) for the 2012-2013 biennium based on lessons learned after introducing and implementing the GSPs in 2010-2011.

52. Delegations expressed appreciation for the streamlining of the GSPs for 2012-2013, but cautioned that this should not affect the scope of data available or the possibility of maintaining continuity in analyzing results across several years. The importance of linking vital parts of operational management processes to the GSPs was underlined, including participatory planning involving key stakeholders, strong monitoring and reporting together with partners, and reliable performance monitoring and RBM tools, such as *Global Focus*. Questions were raised regarding the appropriate application of indicators in different settings, given situation-specific considerations, and why levels of engagement varied among the operational GSPs.

53. The Director indicated that UNHCR was fully aware of the need to ensure continuity in GSP monitoring in key areas, and said that work was being pursued to develop the analytical capacity of *Global Focus* in relation to the GSPs, which were part of a broader results framework underpinning the Office's efforts to build comprehensive planning and reporting on results. The Deputy Director of DPSM commented on some of the differences in levels of engagement, which were related to variations in UNHCR's responsibilities and assessed needs in each field operation, as well as difficulties in measuring progress against indicators in urban settings in some cases.

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**B. UNHCR's programme in the United Nations Proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015**

54. UNHCR's draft programme in the United Nations Proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015 (A/67/6 (Prog.21) was reviewed. Delegations proposed a number of amendments to the text, which were subsequently transmitted to the Programme Planning and Budget Division of the United Nations Secretariat in New York on 26 March 2012. The amendments have been reflected in the consolidated conference room paper (E/At.51/2012/CRP. 1), containing changes requested by all relevant sectoral, functional and regional bodies, for presentation to the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) at its June 2012 session.

55. The Standing Committee adopted an amended decision (see Annex II of the present document), taking note of the draft programme on the understanding that the requested amendments would be transmitted to New York.

**VII. Any other business**

56. The Rapporteur made a presentation on the Executive Committee conclusions process, recalling four points that had been identified for review: (1) the purpose of the conclusions, (2) the selection of themes, (3) the negotiation process and timeline, and (4) the follow-up mechanisms to ensure visibility and usefulness of the conclusions. Since consensus had not yet been reached on all of the above points, it was agreed that the Rapporteur would continue to consult informally with interested delegations until such time when a consensus could be reached on the way forward. The Chairman encouraged delegations to communicate concrete suggestions to the Rapporteur in order to be able to advance the process.

57. There being no other business, the Chairperson closed the meeting.

## Annex I

### Decision on budgets and funding in 2012

*The Standing Committee,*

*Recalling* the Executive Committee's decision at its sixty-second session on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1107, para.13) as well as its discussions under the programme budgets and funding item at the fifty-second meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2011,

*Reaffirming* the importance of international burden and responsibility-sharing in reducing the burden on countries hosting refugees, especially developing ones,

1. *Recalls* that the Executive Committee, at its sixty-second session, approved programmes and budgets for Regional Programmes, Global Programmes and Headquarters under UNHCR's 2012-2013 Biennial Programme Budget amounting to \$3,591.2 million for 2012;
2. *Notes* that the 2012 supplementary budgets currently amount to \$155.9 million for programmes benefiting refugees and internally displaced persons;
3. *Takes* note of the increase in UNHCR's 2012 Annual Budget to a total of \$3,747.1 million;
4. *Recognizes* that emergencies and unforeseen activities unfolding in 2012 may result in the need for additional or expanded supplementary budgets, and that additional resources, over and above those for existing budgets, would be needed to meet such needs; and
5. *Urges* Member States to continue to respond generously, in a spirit of solidarity and in a timely manner, to the High Commissioner's appeal for resources to meet in full the 2012 Annual Budget.

## Annex II

### **Decision on UNHCR's programme in the United Nations proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015**

*The Standing Committee,*

*Takes note of document A/67/6 (Prog. 21), Programme 21: International protection, durable solutions, and assistance to refugees of the biennial programme plan of the United Nations proposed strategic framework for the period 2014-2015, on the understanding that amendments proposed at the 53<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee under agenda item 6 (b) will be taken into consideration during the review of the proposed strategic framework by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in May/June 2012.*

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