**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Standing Committee
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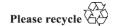
Staff security

Summary

This paper provides an overview of actions undertaken to strengthen staff security since the last update to the Standing Committee in March (EC/65/SC/CRP.3) as well as September 2014 (EC/65/SC/CRP.20). It reports on the ways in which the organization manages security risks in challenging environments to enable UNHCR to "stay and deliver," consistent with the United Nations Security Management System's principle of "how to stay" as opposed to "when to leave." Measures taken are also consistent with UNHCR's "Culture of security 2015-2017: An updated plan of action" and build upon the United Nations Security Management System, which is led by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security and coordinated through the Inter-Agency Security Management Network.

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I. Introduction

1.   UNHCR is increasingly called upon to work in areas of high security risk. In Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, Yemen and elsewhere, personnel are exposed to the dangers of armed conflict and political and civil unrest. UNHCR must ensure that effective security measures are in place and that personnel are prepared to operate in high-risk environments in order to continue delivering life-saving assistance and protection to persons of concern.

2.   Central to UNHCR's approach is building a "culture of security," understood as a wide range of behaviours, practices and attitudes that become the norm among the workforce of an organization. This is achieved by integrating security and safety into the normal course of operations and activities from the earliest stages. It requires that all managers be responsible and accountable for security, viewing security from a risk management perspective, and that all staff also assume individual responsibility. It entails adopting sound security management practices, such as analyzing the environment and applying appropriate mitigating measures. To support this "culture of security," UNHCR is an active member of the United Nations Security Management System, complying with established guidelines and contributing to the improvement of its overall security management activities.

II. Operating in challenging security environments

3.   Conflicts in many regions of the world have continued to pose daunting challenges for UNHCR personnel. In the Middle East, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and, most recently, Yemen are among the most difficult operating environments.

4.   In the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR has taken a cautious and flexible approach. Cross-line missions from government-controlled to contested areas are resource intensive and often postponed or cancelled due to localized fighting. Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2165, UNHCR also undertakes cross-border missions from Jordan and Turkey to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, but localized fighting and the presence of armed groups hinder movement.

5.   Air strikes in Yemen led to the temporary withdrawal and subsequent return of United Nations international personnel. In the interim, national staff and local partners continued to provide assistance to persons of concern in extremely difficult circumstances.

6.   In Africa, a large number of attacks have targeted humanitarian workers in Somalia. Armed groups have shown that they are able and willing to undertake complex and repeated attacks, primarily directed at the United Nations. In April 2015, an attack against UNICEF in Garowe resulted in the deaths of four United Nations staff and two local security personnel. Despite this, UNHCR bolstered its presence by opening new offices in Kismayo and Baidoa, in order to respond to returning Somali refugees and an influx of refugees from Yemen. In neighbouring Kenya, repeated threats have been made against the United Nations in Dadaab. In April 2014, the attempted abduction of an international staff member resulted in a local security assistant being wounded.

7.   Insurgency in Nigeria has led to widespread displacement, and conflict has spilled across the border into Cameroon, Chad and Niger. With recent fighting in Cameroon, UNHCR has reviewed its operations near the border, reclassifying the area as a non-family duty station. There are fears of a widening conflict and growing concerns that more extreme tactics and attacks will be used against humanitarian workers.

8.   Other parts of Africa continue to experience violent clashes. Last year, in the Central African Republic, a UNHCR driver was abducted and killed, while other UNHCR personnel were subjected to threats at offices, residences, and on the road. In Mali, the situation remains insecure, with vast areas of the country under the control of armed actors. They continue to endanger the lives of staff and hinder access to persons of concern. South Sudan has also been the theatre of unpredictable hostilities, which have led to the temporary downsizing or relocation of UNHCR and partner personnel on several occasions. In conflict-affected areas in the Upper Nile and Unity states, programmes and operations were adjusted to balance operational needs against risks. Finally, civil unrest and electoral violence has spread to many parts of the continent, most notably to Burundi. In September 2014, while on leave in his home country of Burkina Faso, a staff member was killed during sudden unrest.

9.   Despite peace negotiations, threats and attacks in various parts of Afghanistan continue to target humanitarian workers. In the past year, UNHCR has nevertheless been able to provide 250,000 people fleeing conflict in neighbouring Pakistan with shelter and other live-saving assistance in Khost and Paktika provinces.

10.   In Eastern Ukraine, UNHCR carried out security measures to ensure that staff can move safely to reach people affected by conflict. These included training and the continuous review and assessment of the security environment.

III.   Strengthening a culture of security

11.   UNHCR's efforts to strengthen a "culture of security" address five areas: advice and support; the security workforce; governance and oversight; inter-agency partnership; and training.   While the responsibility for ensuring security is shared throughout the organization, the Field Security Service in UNHCR's Division of Emergency, Security and Supply leads these efforts.

A.   Advice and support

12.   Managers coordinating activities to protect and assist those in need must understand the security environment in which they work in order to make appropriate risk management decisions.   UNHCR therefore seeks to identify threats to both personnel and persons of concern.   The Field Security Service and Field Safety Advisers (FSAs) contribute to developing this analysis, which is complemented by information provided by United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and other sources.   Contingency planning and other preparedness measures are designed in cooperation with country operations and regional bureaux to enable UNHCR to better anticipate deteriorating situations that require a response.   While advice and support are ideally preventive, UNHCR also implements responsive measures to ensure managers and staff are supported when a critical security incident occurs. Immediate responses to save lives, administrative measures to adhere to appropriate operating procedures, and medical and psychosocial support may also be provided.

13.   In order to implement appropriate security measures, UNHCR maintains a rapidly deployable stockpile of equipment to provide offices and staff accommodation with basic mitigation, including access control and personal protective equipment, perimeter security, lighting, shatter resistant film, and armoured vehicles. The Field Security Service also deploys a structural engineer upon request to ensure that mitigation measures are sufficient to protect against weaponry in the given environment.   Due to increasing requests for such expertise, UNHCR is developing a blast vulnerability assessment tool to provide guidance

on immediate mitigation measures and determine whether further support from an engineer is required. A field reference group will test this tool in the third quarter of 2015.

B. Security workforce

14. UNHCR remains committed to maintaining a highly professional security workforce. At present, UNHCR employs some 70 professional FSAs and more than twice as many locally recruited security staff. FSAs are selected based on their professional knowledge, analytical skills, multicultural communication skills, and humanitarian understanding. In recent months, the Office has sought to recruit and train African and French-speaking FSAs to meet specific needs. In keeping with UNHCR's policy to promote national officers, staff employed as FSAs at the national level may be deployed on mission and subsequently considered for international postings. The Field Security Service also deploys personnel from headquarters or regional FSAs to support operations in emergencies.

C. Governance and oversight

15. An important part of adapting to high-risk environments is balancing programmatic activities against attendant risks, taking appropriate mitigating measures, and aligning operating posture accordingly. The Security Steering Committee, which is chaired by the High Commissioner or Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and comprises senior managers at headquarters and in the field, has been established for this purpose. In recent months, the Security Steering Committee has evaluated developments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Yemen. Moreover, procedures for decision-making in rapidly changing high-risk environments will be formalized into administrative instructions later this year.

16. The Field Security Service is developing a "stress test" to identify gaps in preparedness and help determine which additional measures are needed. It will be piloted in 2015 and rolled out to a number of operations in 2016.

D. Inter-agency partnership

17. UNHCR works closely with the UNDSS to develop policies for the United Nations Security Management System. These efforts are coordinated – both at headquarters and in the field – within the framework of the Inter-Agency Security Management Network. The Field Security Service communicates daily with both UNDSS and other members of the United Nations Security Management System. FSAs are also active members of security cells and provide day-to-day assistance to enhance the capacity of the United Nations Security Management System in-country.

18. A major recent achievement of an Inter-Agency Security Management Network working group has been the creation of a unified safety and security recording system, which will record all developments that affect the United Nations in one central database. UNHCR is an active participant in this working group. All United Nations agencies will have access to ensure that the platform is fully integrated and analysis is shared.

19. UNHCR is also an active member of the Programme Criticality Steering Committee, working with partner agencies to establish and disseminate guidelines. Programme criticality is crucial in providing a structured method for assessing which activities warrant continuation when risks are high. In September 2015, UNHCR will co-host an inter-agency training on programme criticality designed to ensure widespread organizational understanding of its methodology and concepts.

20.   As part of the United Nations Decade of Action on Road Safety, UNHCR invited the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Road Safety, Mr. Jean Todt, for the launch of UNHCR's "Safe Road Use Campaign" on 10 June 2015. According to the World Health Organization, more than 1 million deaths occurred on the world's roads in 2010, with an additional 50 million injured. UNHCR is committed to promoting safe driving to reduce the number and impact of road crashes involving UNHCR staff and partners. Activities will include workshops, messaging campaigns, and the creation of a dedicated web platform for staff and managers.

21.   As an active member of the Saving Lives Together Oversight Committee, UNHCR regularly demonstrates its commitment to the "Saving Lives Together"[1] approach through close cooperation with partners on security matters. UNHCR's security team in Jordan, for example, manages security coordination mechanisms and provides assistance on security to partners working in Za'atari and Azraq refugee camps.

E.   Training

22.   Ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to work in high-risk environments remains a priority for UNHCR. UNHCR trains managers at the annual Security Management Learning Programme, and security management exercises tailored for specific environments are offered on request. Over 200 managers will have undergone these trainings in the course of 2015. Security training remains a vital component of the Workshop for Emergency Management. Staff continue to receive additional training when deployed to high-risk environments and, whenever possible, operational partners are also invited to participate.

23.   UNHCR attaches great importance to training FSAs in accordance with requirements set by the United Nations Security Management System's security certification process and UNHCR's organization-specific learning (e.g. international protection). The Office also provides training to raise the professional skills of national staff and identify personnel with the potential to assume greater responsibility.

24.   Recognizing that drivers are at particular risk and make security decisions that affect all passengers in their vehicle, UNHCR is pursuing ongoing efforts to train drivers. Instructional videos that teach drivers to continuously adapt and apply new techniques are being produced. Defensive driving skills and driving armoured vehicles are included in their tailored training.

25.   Taking into account the specific threats women may face, UNHCR has piloted specific training for female personnel, consisting of eight e-learning modules and six hours of practical training on averting attacks and self-defence.

IV.   Conclusion

26.   UNHCR is committed to ensuring a safe working environment for its personnel as it seeks to "stay and deliver" for persons of concern. Strengthening a "culture of security" based on sound risk management practices begins with close cooperation with partners, especially host governments, who retain the primary responsibility for the security and protection of United Nations personnel. UNHCR's efforts are further enhanced by

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[1] "Saving Lives Together" is a framework for security collaboration among intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations, and was launched by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Collaborative Approaches to Security in 2006.

continuous analysis and adaptation tailored to context. Adequate resources for security are essential, and training ensures that UNHCR staff are fully aware of security risks and able to respond. In this context, sustained engagement and support from all stakeholders is more crucial than ever.

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