

Introductory remarks for the 68th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Room XIX, Palais des Nations
14-15 March 2017

Mme. Chairperson,

Excellencies,

I first addressed the Standing Committee in September 2015. Much has happened since then, both within UNHCR and in the world in which we live, but one thing remains: I am still extremely honored to address you and humbled by the opportunity to serve this organization and people forcibly displaced throughout the world.

Our extensive and strong network of partners, including all of you in the room, remains a key strength of the agency. I look forward to our work over the coming days to review progress made on a variety of issues and how, collectively, we can work to further improve our delivery.

As context for these discussions, let's reflect for a moment on the significant momentum we have achieved in improving key aspects of the management of the organization. Taken together, the various initiatives set in motion over the last year will undoubtedly make us more efficient, effective, and responsive to the needs of people of concern.

We are continuing to move forward with reforms in UNHCR's oversight functions on which we have reported in previous sessions. These reforms have the dual aim of strengthening individual functions and improving the coordination among these functions. You will be hearing later from our new Inspector General, Karen Farkas, whose office has been actively working to implement reforms and consolidate oversight functions brought under the umbrella of the IGO. Ms. Farkas is working closely with all colleagues engaged in the provision of oversight services, including the new Head of our Ethics Office, Helmut Buss, who joined us in January and brings strong skills and experience from his previous experience in UNHCR, other UN agencies and, more recently, the ICRC.

We are also revising our internal resource allocation mechanisms. The changes entail reinforcing strategic policy discussions and decisions early in the planning process to guide planning in field operations and bolster strategic alignment of plans and budgets with corporate priorities. The revised approach also aims to consolidate the planning process and streamline the review and internal approval of our biennial budget. As part of these changes, we are also streamlining our internal decision-making mechanisms guided by the principle of responsible delegation to managers in the field and at Headquarters. We are also optimizing the internal budget committee and reconfiguring the supporting secretariat to include a broader range of functions for a fuller analysis of programmes. Together, these changes will further improve the organization's ability to analyze and prioritize needs, supporting difficult decisions throughout the year.

In late 2016, we initiated a review of our headquarters locations to ensure that the design and functions of our Headquarters are tailored to provide the best possible support to our field operations. This initiative demonstrates our proactive dedication to ensuring that our institutional structure remains as relevant as our mandate. We are in the process of considering a number of important prompts for meaningful change, which should make us a more nimble organization with lighter processes and simplified procedures. We are confident that this transformation will help us improve the way that headquarters serves, supports, and learns from, our field operations.

Mme. Chairperson,

I have in the past noted our concern in light of the funding gap faced by the agency. Operating with, at most, half of the budget needed to meet identified needs is a challenging exercise. Tragically, this has real life consequences in particular for the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide who rely on UNHCR for protection, solutions and life-saving aid.

This funding gap remains more than ever a concern for the organization. We last met in September 2016, in the days that followed the Adoption of the New York Declaration by the governments of 193 countries and the Leaders' Summit on Refugees which saw commitments of increased support, financial and otherwise, by 50 nations and organizations.

Despite the unequivocal commitment to refugee protection that this represents, and the strong expressions of confidence in and support for UNHCR that were reiterated during and after the September Summits, we are entering a period of some uncertainty with regard to our funding situation. This year, we have already received just over 1 billion of fresh income for 2017 – corresponding to 14% of our global requirements. However, this represents US\$ 98 million less in contributions than at the same time last year.

We are unable to confidently predict that we will reach levels on a par with 2015 and 2016, at a time when the needs, and the demands on UNHCR, remain high. The spending authority that we give to our field operations is always based on a prudent analysis of the funds we expect to receive in the course of the year. If we are not able to achieve greater financial certainty and increase our funding projections, we may be compelled to adjust spending authorities provided to our field operations and management entities. This would entail reductions in our operational footprint for 2017, with significant consequences for displaced and stateless people as well as their host States and communities.

Excellencies,

For people around the world, such budgetary restraints threaten dire consequences. In South Sudan alone, 100,000 people face starvation and a further million people are on the brink of famine. Close to 140,000 people have fled the country in the first few months of 2017 alone and close to two million have so far been displaced within the country. The people of South Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Nigeria, to mention only a few, cannot afford to see reductions in UNHCR's support.

In Iraq, 215,000 people have been displaced by fighting in and around Mosul since October 2016 and a further 5,000 people are displaced every day. With close to 90 per cent of the plots built by the Iraqi government and humanitarian partners now occupied, UNHCR

colleagues in the country are hard at work erecting three new camps to shelter another 70,000 displaced people.

In the five days that followed the opening of Chamakor camp, where most of the newly displaced people fleeing West Mosul are now, close to 4,000 traumatized, tired and hungry women and children were given a private space, a hot meal and water before going through registration and being allocated a tent. But responding to displacement from Mosul in 2017 will require 212 million US dollars. Maintaining our support to the displaced requires 7 million US dollars in the next two weeks and an additional 30 million in the next two months. Your early flexible contributions are essential to allow us to prioritize our interventions based on the most critical needs at any given moment.

Our financial uncertainty also has implications for our 2018 planning. We are in the process of completing our global needs assessment for 2018 and drawing up operational plans and budgets. This process requires that operations consider anticipated resources, based on expected funding, to develop the likely parameters of their operations next year. This is critical to ensuring that our operations are broadly aligned, as we start the year, with resources we are likely to have at our disposal, and requires that some of the groundwork already be laid in 2017.

At this point, if additional commitments are made beyond those projected, there is still time to maintain our operations at the levels needed for 2017 and to have the ‘footprint’ needed to deliver into 2018. But this year’s planning process for 2018 has provided sobering insights into what could happen if we are unable to expect more funding. We would be forced to focus on core protection and lifesaving activities to the detriment of longer term assistance; impact our ability to deliver on Grand Bargain commitments with regards to cash; and our capacity for operational engagement with IDPs. We would even be forced to scale down and restructure some offices and operations.

The High Commissioner and his senior leadership team are actively engaging with our donors to alert them to our concerns – including many of your governments, emerging donors, as well as the private sector. As I have already noted, we are doing everything we can to ensure that the organization makes full use of whatever resources are available.

The record levels of funds you have provided us in 2016 are a testament to the considerable confidence you have in UNHCR. I convey our sincere gratitude to those of you who have continued and even increased your contributions. Your strategic, political, and financial help allows UNHCR and its 900+ partners to serve displaced and stateless populations that have nowhere else to turn. Our role as a leading humanitarian organization is built upon such investments in our collective future.

We remain grateful for your commitment to our common cause, and steadfast in our determination to be worthy of your help.

Thank you.