

## SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES

### I. INTRODUCTION

1. Managing the security of UNHCR's staff, as well as that of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and others of concern to the Office, has become a major challenge in today's operating environment. Over 80 percent of all UNHCR staff work in countries where there is a United Nations security phase and almost 60 percent are in locations where risks are deemed high enough (security phase III and above) for there to be security restrictions. Yet it is precisely when the security risk is highest, and access is restricted for humanitarian staff, that the threats to refugee safety are often the greatest. The challenge for UNHCR is to find the balance between operational and security imperatives in such a way as to avoid being crippled operationally, without compromising staff safety.

2. During 2001, in response to these challenges, UNHCR took action, both internally and at the level of the overall United Nations security system, to increase its capacity and to improve the management of security for operations in the field. This conference room paper provides an update on the key measures undertaken in this respect and also on the outcome of the specific efforts made to enhance refugee security in collaboration with governments and the United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operations.

### II. INCREASE IN FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR SECURITY

3. Measures to improve the management of staff safety were made possible by additional financial allocations. Following the internal review conducted in 2001, a US\$3 million package for the enhancement of staff safety was submitted as an addendum to the 2001 Global Appeal. Thanks to strong donor support, the increase in security-related staff capacity, as recommended in this report, was fully funded.

4. This has resulted in the addition of 16 field safety advisor posts; 3 staff welfare posts; 2 medical service posts; and 1 additional post for telecommunications. A further 22 local posts for field safety assistants were created and made available to countries in all regions according to identified needs. The strengthening of staff capacities was the main and most costly element of this enhancement package, which aimed to provide better support to the field in all areas affecting staff safety.

5. Funds were also made available to increase and improve security training. This included the development of a new action-learning methodology and inter-active CD-ROM to be used as a distance-learning tool to ensure basic security training for all staff. When ready at the end of 2002, this tool will also be made available to the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) for United Nations system-wide use. Financial allocations were also made for security equipment and the development of analytical tools.

6. Additional funds will be required for the implementation of Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS), as recommended in 2001 by the inter-agency working group on security, led by UNSECOORD, for adoption as policy at all duty stations. UNHCR has allocated US\$3 million for 2002 as a provision for upgrading security equipment, communications, training, and other safety measures in locations where these are below standard. This is in addition to routine provisions for security measures budgeted by each operation at the country level.

7. It will be recalled that the General Assembly decided to fund the increased cost of the United Nations security system managed by UNSECOORD through cost-sharing by UN agencies, funds and programmes. The current biennial budget of UNSECOORD has been increased from US\$ 2.4 million to US\$ 53.4 million, of which US\$ 25.5 million has been allocated for increasing the number of field security personnel from 60 to 100. Following agreement reached in late 2001 on a revised cost-sharing formula, UNHCR will contribute approximately seven per cent of the total cost of the UN security system amounting to some US\$ 2 million annually. This requirement has been flagged under a supplementary appeal for donors' attention in 2002.

### III. ENHANCING SECURITY MANAGEMENT INTERNALLY

8. Efforts to improve security management within UNHCR have so far focused on three key objectives. They are:

- a) Mainstreaming responsibilities through better integration of security concerns in operation planning, better definition of responsibilities and accountability of staff at all levels, and training to enable staff to respond appropriately to security risks;
- b) Establishing a more proactive approach to security management by enhancing monitoring and analytical capacity so as to better anticipate risk situations;
- c) Maintaining minimum standards for security.

Thanks to the additional resources and capacities made available, progress has been made on all three fronts, even if much remains to be done.

#### Mainstreaming

9. Progress in mainstreaming security responsibilities has been reflected in the increased awareness and greater priority given to security concerns both at headquarters and in the field. In 2001, the High Commissioner issued a personal letter to all bureau directors and representatives in the field to emphasize their specific responsibilities where staff safety is concerned. There has been a notable increase in the number of requests from field operations for support in security management, resulting in greater deployment of security staff to the field, both on a short and long term basis. A key priority of the security staff deployed to the field is to capacitate the staff to respond more effectively to security risks, through, *inter alia*, on-the-spot coaching, briefing and interventions. These efforts were also complemented in the ten most-at-risk duty stations by intensive situation-specific training using the new interactive learning methodology.

10. Since UNSECOORD has been tasked by the General Assembly to develop a clear mechanism for accountability and responsibility in the area of security, it was decided to hold in abeyance the original plan to develop specific UNHCR internal tools for this purpose. Instead, the Office has participated actively in the UNSECOORD-led efforts to define an accountability system which would include all levels within each organization in the United Nations security management system. The proposed accountability system will be submitted to the High Level Committee on Management (HLCM), the Chief Executives' Board (CEB)<sup>1</sup> and eventually the General Assembly. Once approved, these accountabilities will be incorporated into each organization's human resource management for enforcement.

11. Two new internal mechanisms have been established to ensure more effective management and integration of security resources in UNHCR's operations. Dedicated budget lines at the regional level will meet unforeseen security needs in the field, and field operations will now differentiate their security needs from other administrative requirements. This will help ensure that adequate security resources are "protected" from the risk of resource constraints. Resources for security should be needs-driven rather than subjected to availability of funds. Given the increase in security staffing needs and the limitations to

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<sup>1</sup> Previously ACC

continued post creations, more flexible mechanisms for deploying security staff to the field have been established. This flexibility is needed because of the highly fluctuating nature of security needs.

12. In addition to posts already established in specific locations, two other measures for strengthening human resources have been taken:

- a) a central pool (6 posts) of security officers has been created for deployment to operations wherever there are urgent needs. These staff are not bound by the administrative restrictions of a post fixed to a given location;
- b) a type of retainer contract has been drawn up to provide for the availability of security officers who would be on standby during the year in return for guaranteed employment of at least 6 months. At the end of 2001, 31 international security staff and 31 local staff positions were assigned to the field, supported by a team of 6 professionals at headquarters. This capacity is being complemented by a fluctuating pool of short-term staff, including personnel seconded through standby arrangements to meet urgent needs.

13. The integration of the Field Staff Safety Section in the restructured Emergency and Security Service (ESS), which reports directly to the Assistant High Commissioner, has facilitated the integration of security concerns in emergency operations. By and large, security staff have been included in headquarters task forces on operations, and security staff in the field are better integrated in operational teams.

14. The objective of fostering a culture of safety by mainstreaming safety and security considerations into all of UNHCR's operations may not yet have been completely achieved but it is certainly being nurtured through the considerable attention and institutional responsiveness paid to this area since the tragedies of Atambua and Macenta.

#### Proactive management

15. With increased staff capacity in the field and the headquarters, it has been possible to place greater emphasis on monitoring and analysing changes in the security environment. While no formal security tracking system has yet been developed, efforts are continuing to gather, collate and disseminate security-related information especially for high-risk areas. ESS has assumed responsibility for the commissioning of analytical reports on security situations through 'Write-Net'. The aim is to develop a mechanism for situational analysis to be provided on a regular basis for potential high-risk areas where security and emergency are concerned. When recruiting new staff, greater emphasis has been put on identifying candidates with the ability and skills for analysing the security environment.

16. To support the field in a more proactive management of their security environment, field security advisers at headquarters have increased their field missions to conduct security audits so that pre-emptive measures can be taken and security gaps addressed. So far a total of 17 security audits have been conducted in field locations. To facilitate oversight from headquarters, regular reporting is expected from security staff in the field. Regular security reviews are also planned with the regional bureaux at headquarters to highlight changes in the security environment in country operations and to identify any new action that may be needed.

#### Maintaining standards

17. The implementation of MOSS is an exercise which has to be carried out throughout the UN system in all locations where there is a security phase, with individual agencies being responsible for ensuring these standards within their own operations. An UNSECOORD survey indicates that there are very few operations that have met the minimum standards established according to the security phases. For example, some 48 percent of UNHCR's field operations have yet to become MOSS-compliant. Urgent action is therefore required, and US\$3 million have therefore been allocated proportionately to each regional security budget for these purposes. Identifying the MOSS gaps in each country operation is however time-consuming, and will more time will be required to implement relevant responses. Priority is being given to following up on this exercise.

#### IV. STRENGTHENING OF THE UN SECURITY SYSTEM

18. In 2001, the General Assembly approved a number of very significant measures for increasing the capacity of the United Nations security system. UNHCR has followed these new developments closely in order to ensure that our own internal measures for enhancing security capacity are in harmony with and complementary to the measures being undertaken at the United Nations system level. There has also been active UNHCR participation in the establishment of an inter-agency governance mechanism for UNSECOORD, which should enable agencies to provide input to security policies being developed. However, it remains to be seen if the newly-established inter-agency security management network (ISMN) will be supported by the participating organisations at the appropriate level to shape United Nations policies on security.

19. The main area in which UNSECOORD's capacity has been strengthened is in the increased number of field security staff which will eventually total 100 international and 200 local staff. While this will provide better coverage in the field for the UN system as a whole, UNSECOORD's presence will remain focused on capital cities and locations where there are multiple UN agencies. Given the nature and location of UNHCR's operations, it is clear that a substantial in-house security staff capacity will still be required to complement that of UNSECOORD.

20. With this increased capacity, UNSECOORD will be able to expand its services in areas such as field co-ordination, investigation, accountability and compliance audits, training etc. UNHCR welcomes the efforts by UNSECOORD to establish a more effective central UN security system. As an integral part of this system, UNHCR will continue to co-operate fully with UNSECOORD in this respect. At the same time, however, the Office's position is that any such centralisation must continue to take into account the special needs of humanitarian agencies, such as UNHCR, which operate in constantly changing security environments. There will be a need for a certain degree of flexibility if UNHCR is to fulfil its mandate and operate effectively on the ground to protect and assist refugees without being unduly hampered by staff safety regulations and procedures.

#### V. COLLABORATION WITH NGOS

21. In pursuit of further collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on security, UNHCR participated in the IASC Task Force on UN-NGO collaboration on security. This Task Force has developed a set of recommendations reflecting agreement on the broad areas for UN-NGO collaboration on security at the country level, while providing a menu of options for concrete measures that would allow the nature of this collaboration to be customised, according to the local situation and configuration of NGOs and United Nations agencies in the country. These recommendations have now been approved by the IASC and the ACC for dissemination. UNHCR has distributed these approved guidelines to field offices and will monitor the extent to which they are used.

22. A more specific initiative which is being undertaken by UNHCR is the secondment of a field security officer by IRC to UNHCR in Guinea in order to enhance its capacity to extend security services to NGOs. The seconded security officer works as a member of the UNHCR team with access to all security channels and equipment, but focuses on extending services such as security briefing, training and advice to the NGO community. In view of the general expectations that NGOs place on UNHCR and the United Nations for their security, if this experiment works well, it could be extended to areas where there are similar needs. However, UNHCR is part of the United Nations security system which takes responsibilities only for United Nations staff, and so the types of security services which can be provided to NGOs will be limited. For instance, UNHCR will not be able to guarantee to NGOs services that are organised on a United Nations system-wide basis, e.g. evacuation. Nevertheless, there is increasing support throughout the United Nations system for better co-operation and collaboration with NGOs. The problem remains one of capacity.

## VI. REFUGEE SECURITY

23. While recognising that refugee security on the ground is often inextricably linked to staff security, UNHCR has kept in focus the fact that refugee security is also integral to other functions of the Office, most notably protection, assistance and community services. The security of refugees is threatened not only by the militarization of camps and the presence of armed elements among refugee populations, but also by factors such as those illustrated by the recent events in West Africa, which have shown all too clearly that the issue needs to be dealt with in a more comprehensive and holistic manner. Lack of security for refugees covers a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from: the refugees' vulnerable state of dependency within the confines of a camp; their vulnerability vis-à-vis the host communities who may perceive refugees as competitors for scarce economic resources; general lawlessness in an environment where state control may be weak or non-existent; infiltration of armed of armed elements; and political manipulation by non-neutral parties. The so-called "ladder of options"<sup>2</sup> provided the conceptual framework to identify a range of solutions graduating from "soft to hard", according to the gravity of the threats encountered.

24. In the past year, in attempting to meet certain gaps in the Office's capacity, UNHCR has focused on developing a standby capacity of law enforcement and public security experts, referred to as Humanitarian Security Officers. It was foreseen that such expertise would be deployed with UNHCR teams to situations where there may be refugee security problems arising from a breakdown of law and order inside or outside the camps, or involvement of armed elements. Recognising the responsibilities of host States, a key function of such experts would be to assist local law enforcement authorities and to build their capacity through training. While a number of governments, showed interest in this concept, they appeared to have difficulty in committing to a standby arrangement. Canada has however indicated willingness to make available one or two officers from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to Guinea on a pilot basis for one year. The fact that Canada and the United Kingdom, in collaboration with UNHCR, organised an international seminar to explore the role of the military in Refugee Camp Security in July 2001 (itself a follow-up to the March 2000 workshop that looked at the role of international police in camp security), is hopefully an endorsement of the need to establish a "hard" option capacity. Due to the lack of significant progress in this respect, the guidance of the Standing Committee on how to mobilise outside resources, for the "middle" and "hard" options would be welcomed.

25. Efforts to engage the Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) in specific situations where an existing peacekeeping mission may assist in mitigating an insecure refugee environment have continued. Based on an exchange of letters, UNHCR requested the involvement of the Department on three occasions. These were:

- 1) to undertake needs assessment at the height of the West Africa crisis in December 2000, when rampant fighting and frequent incursions along the border of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone by different rebel groups and government forces had serious consequences for refugee security;
- 2) to assist with the separation of armed combatants who have entered Zambia from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in January 2001; and
- 3) to separate armed combatants from refugees during a population displacement from Central African Republic to Zongo in the DRC, in August 2001.

26. While MONUC has been responsive to the latter request, the absence of solutions in other areas has shown so far that United Nations peacekeeping operations are often constrained by their mandate and procedures, and cannot easily take on tasks dictated by a given situation. Nevertheless UNHCR will continue its efforts to build a solid and mutually beneficial partnership with DPKO. It is a positive sign that the staff exchange programme with DPKO is moving forward. UNHCR seconded a staff member to DPKO in September 2001 and a DPKO staff member is expected to join ESS in the course of the summer.

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<sup>2</sup> See EC/50/SC/INF.4

## VII. CONCLUSION

27. From such efforts to develop a more comprehensive approach to the issues of both refugee and staff security, it is clear that the key challenge is one of capacity. UNHCR needs to enhance its existing ability to cope with the "soft" options and develop new means to deal with the "hard" ones as well. Concrete donor support in these endeavours will clearly be essential.