

**56th Meeting of the Standing Committee
“Emergency Preparedness and Response”
6 March 2013**

**Introductory Statement of Mr. Amin Awad,
Director, Division of Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS)**

Madam Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

In March 2011, I reported to the Standing Committee on our activities to enhance UNHCR’s emergency response capacity with the aim to make it more robust, consistent and predictable. Since then, the Office, together with its partners, responded to simultaneous and large-scale refugee emergencies in complex operational contexts. Insecurity and lack of infrastructure were at times additional factors, challenging a timely and adequate response to the needs of refugees and other persons of concern. These included, naming just a few: the Arab Spring, the Horn of Africa, South Sudan, the Mali situation, and of course the Syria situation, which has resulted in close to one million refugees in the neighbouring countries, and with new refugees arriving as we speak. While leading these large refugee emergency operations, UNHCR also contributed to inter-agency efforts to meet the needs of internally displaced persons and other affected populations in new emergencies.

It is against this background that UNHCR strengthened its emergency preparedness and response capacity.

Firstly, the overall objective of the **reform of our emergency response architecture** was to clearly define emergency response as a corporate priority and undertaking in UNHCR, enabling the organization to draw upon the entire range of its capacities, resources and expertise in responding to emergencies. We have made important and solid progress in this regard.

The Emergency Section was upgraded and reconfigured into the Emergency Capacity Management Service (ECMS); with a new staffing structure, and with staff assigned to specific thematic areas while also available for deployments to emergency operations. The Supply Management Service has established an Emergency Response Unit, and aims to further strengthen its emergency response capacity over the coming two years.

Secondly, a review of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response, launched in late summer 2011, pointed to a number of gaps in **policies, procedures, and tools**. These were addressed through the issuance of UNHCR's Emergency Guidance Notes in April 2012. This is not a one-off exercise. As we gather experience with their implementation in emergency operations, the guidelines will be revised and refined as called for, and additional guidance will be issued.

Another major project we embarked on last year is the **revision of the Emergency Handbook**. It was first issued 30 years ago. The 4th edition is now undergoing a revision and update, scheduled to be launched in the summer of this year.

Thirdly, ensuring that emergency operations are **adequately staffed** remains an important element of an effective response. The longstanding Emergency Response Team continues to represent the core of UNHCR's staff standby capacity. Since 2011, we also have the Senior Corporate Emergency Roster, composed of experienced staff at the P5 to D2 level, to strengthen our management and leadership in emergency operations, including within the inter-agency context. This standby capacity is complimented by technical networks, maintained by my own Division, as well as by other Divisions.

Fourthly, I must make specific reference to **UNHCR's partnerships**. The support of our Standby Partners is an important contribution to UNHCR emergency operations. In 2012, we had some 460 deployments to emergency operations of UNHCR staff and Standby Partners. With the help of our partners, UNHCR was able to reduce the number of repeated short term emergency missions, bringing more stability and continuity to the staffing situation earlier on.

Standby Partners are not only important to UNHCR because of deployments. Through these dynamic and constructive partnerships we also benefit from innovation and research initiatives, as well as material support. The strengthening of our cooperation with the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP) in this regard has been very valuable, providing staff accommodation and offices to operations in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Jordan. We are also pleased to inform you that we have concluded a revised partnership with the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief, and expanded our partnerships through new agreements with the White Helmets Commission of Argentina and the public-private partnership of Emergency.lu, led by the government of Luxembourg.

Furthermore, the contribution of **national NGOs** to emergency operations deserves specific mentioning. They are often at the forefront of a response, bring a rich understanding of national and regional dynamics, and have established relations with local communities. UNHCR therefore launched in 2012 a pilot project to strengthen the capacity of eleven national NGOs in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

When speaking of partnerships, it is also essential to mention UNHCR's close collaboration with its **UN sister agencies**, such as WFP, UNICEF and OCHA, both bilaterally and in the context of the IASC and its Transformative Agenda.

Lastly, UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (**the “eCentre”**) brought together senior managers and decision-makers from Asia representing 38 of the most prominent eCentre alumni institutions to launch an Asia-Pacific Emergency Management Platform at the end of 2012. The Platform serves as a vehicle for inter-agency exchange and the pursuit of joint preparedness projects. It aims to complement and reinforce other regional, sub-regional and national initiatives. Platform members will focus on six priority areas: urban contexts; contingency planning; capacitation of local authorities; NGOs and communities; complex security environments; lessons learned; and alignment of strategic objectives among donors, government, civil society and UN.

In conclusion, the measures put in place and the initiatives undertaken to reform our emergency architecture, reinforce the staffing of our operations, and build solid partnerships has resulted in an increasingly strong emergency response capacity over the past two years. These improvements will be an ongoing process as the capacity of UNHCR to respond to emergencies remains a priority of the High Commissioner.

We are grateful for your continued support to these efforts.

Thank you.