

Introductory Remarks of Steven Corliss
Special Adviser on Internal Displacement
Update on UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced persons (EC/69/SC/CRP.9)
72nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

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Thank you, Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before the 72nd Meeting of the Standing Committee to introduce the update on UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced persons.

As set out in the Conference Room Paper, UNHCR's work in situations of internal displacement spans five decades. We have expanded our operational role and commitments to coordination leadership as internal displacement has increased in scope, scale and complexity in recent years.

The growth in UNHCR's budgets for IDP activities is one measure. Over five programme years – from 2014 to 2018 – the Pillar 4 budget approved by the Executive Committee nearly doubled from USD 665.6 million to more than USD 1.2 billion. While our total Pillar 4 expenditures decreased somewhat in 2017, this was mainly due to challenges with humanitarian access in key operations.

UNHCR works with governments, partners and internally displaced people around the world. We respond in urban and rural settings. We are present in the midst of conflict and in protracted situations – from Somalia and South Sudan to Mali and Nigeria to Myanmar and Afghanistan to Iraq and Syria to Georgia and Ukraine to Colombia and Honduras.

While UNHCR makes a valuable contribution to the global response to internal displacement, let me emphasise at the outset that we fully recognise the primary responsibility of States to protect internally displaced people on their territory, meet their basic needs and enable them to achieve solutions. We play a supporting role.

We are also only part of a much broader interagency response to internal displacement, which the Emergency Relief Coordinator leads globally and the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators drive forward at the country level, with the support of the Humanitarian Country Team, OCHA and the full range of UN agencies, NGOs and other partners. We are team players.

Within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee framework, UNHCR leads the Global Protection Cluster and co-leads the Global Shelter Cluster and the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, together with IFRC and IOM. UNHCR also coordinates many of the national protection, shelter and CCCM clusters, most often with NGO partners. We are partners in coordination.

UNHCR combines coordination leadership with operational engagement. This brings us closer to the people, builds our credibility with cluster partners and strengthens relationships with governments, especially at the local level. Helping to meet critical humanitarian needs also builds the trust required for dialogue on sensitive protection issues. We see delivery as a priority.

Let me now focus on the ways UNHCR adapting and preparing for the future. First, we are strengthening UNHCR's engagement with internally displaced people. Second, we are encouraging the interagency community to refocus on internal displacement. Third, we are working collectively to mobilise global and national action on internal displacement.

I will first speak to the ways in which UNHCR is changing.

At the 2016 Executive Committee session, the High Commissioner committed UNHCR to working more systematically across the entire spectrum of displacement, including through a more decisive and predictable engagement with internally displaced people. This orientation is now anchored in UNHCR's Strategic Directions for 2017 to 2021.

Implicit in the High Commissioner's call for change is an assessment that UNHCR has – in some cases – been too hesitant or inconsistent in responding to internal displacement. The High Commissioner wants UNHCR to develop the same “reflex” to protect, respond and catalyse solutions for internally displaced people that we have for refugees.

In 2017, UNHCR completed an internal operational review to identify the changes needed to realise the High Commissioner's vision. The review affirmed that protection and solutions are the key drivers shaping UNHCR's work in internal displacement, as well as our distinct areas of expertise and comparative advantage. The review also produced a comprehensive set of recommendations.

My role as Special Adviser is to promote, catalyse and coordinate implementation of these recommendations. They cover the full arc of displacement from preparedness through to solutions, as well as the essential “enablers” of UNHCR's work, such as programme and budget, workforce management and resource mobilisation. Let me highlight some of the most important work streams.

We are updating UNHCR's policy on internal displacement, which dates back to 2007. While not a panacea, the new policy is essential to embed the High Commissioner's commitment and institutionalise the operational review's recommendations within UNHCR. The updated policy will also make clear what governments, our partners and internally displaced people can expect from us.

The operational review recommended strengthening UNHCR's preparedness and early engagement in new or evolving situations of internal displacement. In response, we are adapting our preparedness “toolkit” to internal displacement. We have also proposed measures to increase UNHCR's capacity to deploy cluster coordinators and other specialised expertise rapidly to the field.

More broadly, we are working to increase the versatility of UNHCR's workforce. We need managers who are able to adapt seamlessly to different coordination environments and structures. UNHCR's new interagency coordination learning programme – now under development – will prepare our staff to work as coordinators in refugee, internal displacement and other settings.

We want to strengthen UNHCR's role in providing quality of data on internal displacement, working in a collaborative and complementary way with our partners. It is only by sharing, combining and “triangulating” data that we can achieve the best, holistic view of internally displaced populations. This will facilitate better humanitarian programming and allow us to link up with development actors.

UNHCR is also building a truly comprehensive approach to solutions. The new Division of Resilience and Solutions has integrated internal displacement at the “DNA” level in its strategic objectives. While the CRRF and our World Bank partnership have focused on refugees and host communities, we are convinced that the lessons learned can inform solutions to internal displacement.

We do see the need to move toward more integrated programming approaches across populations. This presents important challenges. UNHCR's current programming and budgeting structures, systems and tools are based on population groups – refugees, stateless persons and the internally displaced – although reintegration activities can adopt a more holistic, area-based approach.

We will adapt our programme training and guidance to encourage a more integrated view of programming, as possible within current systems constraints. Some field operations have also adopted pragmatic “work around” strategies, but more fundamental and, necessarily, longer-term changes may need to follow.

UNHCR's operational review speaks mainly to organizational and internal questions. We believe, though, that implementing the review's recommendations will make UNHCR a better partner and a more effective and predictable player within the broader humanitarian architecture.

With this in mind, I will now turn to the interagency dimension.

When they met in March for the OCHA-UNHCR High-Level Strategic Meeting, the Emergency Relief Coordinator and High Commissioner agreed on the need to enhance the global response to internal displacement. They focused especially on the need to look for solutions from the outset, working with other stakeholders and within the framework of the Secretary-General's overall reform efforts.

More recently, the Emergency Relief Coordinator asked the High Commissioner to present on internal displacement at the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals meeting held at the end of May. UNHCR supported those discussions with a well-received background paper – entitled "Refocusing on Internal Displacement." I will highlight some of the key touchpoints that we raised.

UNHCR called for strengthened interagency coherence and direction, noting the need for a degree of critical reflection. States have welcomed our various agency initiatives and commitments – OCHA's *Breaking the Impasse* study, IOM's framework for addressing internal displacement and UNHCR's own operational review, among others. But they are rightly asking how do these pieces fit together?

We also underscored the need to elevate protection in the response to internal displacement. In 2013, the IASC Principals strongly committed to making protection central to humanitarian action. Five years on, half of Humanitarian Country Teams have comprehensive protection strategies in place. This suggests a deep disconnect and lack of understanding.

We are not communicating clearly what protection means in simple, human and relatable terms. Conflict-related displacement almost invariably results from failures of protection. When we do not place protection risks and outcomes at the center of our concern, our analysis and our response, we may only treat humanitarian symptoms without addressing the underlying causes.

UNHCR also urged the simplification, rationalisation and lightening our approach to coordination in internal displacement situations. We have bound ourselves up in complex machinery that drains energy and resources. Capitals tend to become the effective "center of gravity" for coordination, with clusters involving many actors who are not seen later at the point of delivery.

To be clear, UNHCR sees effective coordination as essential in our multi-billion dollar "industry." We need to work inclusively, but we should seek to streamline and introduce flexibility wherever possible. We must also transition to adapted coordination models when the context changes, such as when a stronger interface with national and international development actors is needed.

UNHCR also encouraged a more forward leaning and catalytic approach to promoting solutions. The dominant focus on emergency response in the humanitarian coordination architecture and processes has resulted in a relative neglect of solutions for internally displaced people, which tend to fall between the cracks.

Our collective work should be oriented toward solutions early on and before the pathologies of protracted displacement are cemented. The Emergency Relief Coordinator and High Commissioner echoed this in a joint letter to OCHA and UNHCR personnel earlier this month. We need to build upon the valuable work that OCHA and UNHCR are both pursuing in this area.

Before closing, I will speak to planning for global and national action on internal displacement.

Over the past months, UNHCR worked closely with the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, OCHA, the Global Protection Cluster and other partners and stakeholders to develop the GP20 Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for Internally Displaced People.

The 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement this year provides the “launching pad” for the initiative, which explains the shorthand reference “GP20.” The Plan will be implemented over three years from 2018 to 2020. Very importantly, the African Union’s Kampala Convention will mark its 10th anniversary during this period, which will provide further momentum.

The Plan of Action focuses primarily on working at the national level. This is reflected in the Plan’s four priorities: first, strengthening participation by internally displaced people; second, developing and implementing relevant national laws and policies; third, improving data and analysis on internal displacement; and fourth, addressing protracted displacement and supporting solutions.

Through the GP20 Plan of Action, we look forward to supporting national and local governments, internally displaced people and the communities where they live. Engaging with States facing critical challenges of internal displacement is an essential, foundational step toward building the consensus needed for any broader global initiative.

UNHCR also sees GP20 process as a rallying point for the interagency community. By focusing on shared goals and common activities, we can achieve greater coherence and synergies. We can also open up to the broader group of stakeholders needed to deliver solutions to internal displacement, including development actors, international financial institutions and the private sector.

Madame Chairperson, let me conclude here. As always, I look forward to hearing the Committee’s views and answering any questions that you may have, together with Ms. Eyster.

Thank you.