

80th Meeting of the Standing Committee

March 2021

Speech, Inspector General's Office

Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. This committee meeting coincides with the one-year anniversary of my taking up the appointment as UNHCR's Inspector General. It has been a year like no other in my professional career; a full year of working remotely, from home and via video links. I want to express my thanks to UNHCR colleagues who have been gracious in their support and engagement to help me settle into this role fully under such circumstances. I also want to thank my team for adapting, remaining resilient and staying focused on delivery.

My presentation today will focus on activities undertaken by the Inspector General's Office in 2020, which complements my paper. In addition, I would also like to set out some forward-looking thoughts on my strategy for the remaining five years of my tenure.

Delivery on remit

Your Excellencies, The IGO's mandate and remit continues to be guided by UNHCR's *Policy on Independent Oversight*. The IGO is the cornerstone of UNHCR's independent oversight system, which comprises internal and external entities. The system exists to provide UNHCR's stakeholders, governance bodies and executive management, with assurance that UNHCR is working to deliver on its mandate, efficiently, effectively and with integrity.

My Office continues to deliver on *its* three key roles, to coordinate oversight with an aim to ensure they are greater than the sum of their parts; to provide insight through analysis and direct delivery of oversight; and to deliver the investigative response to misconduct.

Oversight coordination

Turning to my Office's first key role. Oversight coordination during 2020 took the form of ensuring an agile and coherent response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where all oversight providers undertook to adjust their plans and their ways of working. For example, OIOS as the provider of the internal audit service to UNHCR, deferred a number of reviews; moved to remote auditing modalities, provided advisory and thematic audit work and reported in a more agile, short-form, manner. The Evaluation Service ensured COVID-related questions were embedded into their evaluations and provided real-time evaluations, to provide ongoing feedback and response to UNHCR management. Towards the end of 2020, the IGO coordinated planning conversations between the key oversight providers to ensure a well-balanced and coherent overall oversight plan for 2021.

The IGO continues to act as the point of UNHCR's contact and liaison for OIOS, as UNHCR's internal auditors, and for the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (JIU). The IGO worked with management colleagues to address long-standing JIU recommendations and closed a significant number of older reports and recommendations. The overall numbers of oversight recommendations outstanding fell during 2020.

The IGO continued to provide secretariat support to the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC), working with them to enable their activities to continue virtually.

Provision of insight

Your Excellencies, For the provision of insight, my Office's second key role, the IGO has continued to generate analysis of oversight findings and has issued a number of thematic analyses to relevant UNHCR management, to support enhanced risk management processes and operational delivery. These build on specific concerns identified by individual oversight providers, and also compare and contrast these with other providers' work, putting those concerns in a broader and more longitudinal frame. These analyses were designed to address root cause and cross-cutting issues and risks.

The oversight community undertook a number of COVID-specific responses. Internal audit reviewed supply chain and procurement activities; partner selection and management; cash based and core relief

items' distribution; and remote programme and protection monitoring. These were undertaken through a mixture of advisory and audit modalities. The IGO reviewed vendor and emergency procurement fraud risk proactively, and the control environment over implementing partners during the pandemic. While the latter review is ongoing, the former identified a number of fraud risks and provided potential leads for fraud investigations. It is too early to conclude, however, that COVID risks have not crystallised without the capacity for oversight providers to visit operations in the field freely.

In 2020, as part of the IGO's plan to invest further in lessons learned from investigations, the Investigation Service issued 40 management implication reports – setting out suggested lessons and risk management responses for UNHCR management consideration. This was a two-fold increase from the 17 reports issued in 2019. Additionally, these reports were more extensive and cross-cutting, in many cases drawing lessons from multiple investigations across different complaint types.

Delivery of integrity response

Distinguished delegates, I now turn to my Office's third key role, investigations work.

In 2020 we received 1,146 misconduct complaints, down slightly from 2019, driven by the initial period of the COVID pandemic. We predict around 1,200 complaints for 2021. We opened 130 cases with a substantiation rate of 55 per cent, in line with 2019, and the top three categories remained, financial fraud (26%), sexual exploitation and abuse (20%) and resettlement fraud (15%). We continued to prioritise sexual exploitation and abuse complaints for investigation, setting a lower threshold for the initiation of an investigation. In a few field-based cases we have delayed investigation until field access is possible, but a vast majority of complaints have been able to be investigated. Complaints implicating implementing partner personnel comprised 83 per cent in 2020, an increasing trend. In response we have developed online training on SEA investigations for partners. This was developed in 2020 and is being finalized presently.

In addition to our investigative response, we have undertaken extensive policy work to enhance the policy and control framework over integrity issues. The Investigation Service has developed and enacted procedures to implement UNHCR's victim-centred approach. We have supported the

development of a new approach to the handling of workplace issues which are not prone to, or could be handled better by, non-investigative responses, working with other UNHCR entities and management. We will implement the resulting changes in 2021.

Despite our proactive and policy work, however, demand on the Investigation Service remains high in volume and complexity.

IGO strategy

Your Excellencies, finally I want to turn to the future.

Whilst this year has been challenging, it has also provided an enhanced opportunity for me to accelerate my strategic planning and reform of the IGO. My overall strategic diagnosis is aligned to that which drove the first phase of oversight reform under my predecessor - that UNHCR's oversight system is suboptimal and can be better coordinated and interfaced with UNHCR's management.

The IGO strategy and supporting actions will complete this reform. The strategy has three core components, finalizing the modernisation and reform envisaged for independent oversight in UNHCR; professionalization of the IGO; and reviewing the boundaries and perimeter of the IGO, with a follow-on recalibration of resource.

Conclusion

In closing, *Distinguished Delegates*, I would like to express my continued deep appreciation for your strong interest in, and support of, my Office's work. I sincerely believe in independent oversight's ability to be positively impactful on UNHCR and the achievement of its mission. We have a clear strategy and basis from which to deliver and, working with your support, will deliver this strategy over the next five years.

Thank you.

(end)