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Speech, Inspector General's Office

Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Mr Vice Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning / afternoon.

It is good to see some partial normality returning to our meetings. I have, since June, been able to commence a schedule of field missions and the oversight community is now actively seeking to return, judiciously, to the field.

I want to complement my *Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1215)*, which covers the year to the end of June 2021, with some contemporaneous, and forward-looking, comments. These will cover the work of my Office within the context of the IGO's five-year strategy.

SEA response

Before I do that, however, I want to refresh delegates' view of how sexual misconduct, both sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment are handled in UNHCR by my Office.

My report contains numerical data on sexual misconduct complaints, but I, and my team, are directly aware that each number represents a person, a life, or lives, severely and negatively affected. Let me state very clearly in this public forum, as Inspector General: there is *no* place in UNHCR for people who commit sexual misconduct. My Office continues to investigate concerns brought to us, without fear or favour. I have the full unequivocal, and indeed passionate, support of both the High, and Deputy High, Commissioners in this regard. My personal and Office's commitment remains to: take all complaints seriously; ensure support is provided to victims; undertake a professional intake assessment and investigation; and to apply a victim-centred approach.

My Office has a very low threshold to prompt investigation; if it is possible to investigate, we will. We have no restrictions over the mode or method of receipt of complaints and have the right to initiate investigations in the absence of a complaint. UNHCR staff have a duty to report misconduct. My Office has the technical capability and will prioritise our stretched capacity to address sexual misconduct complaints.

85% of SEA complaints implicate partner personnel. To address this, we have supported the development of e-training on investigations for partner organisations. I want to acknowledge and appreciate my team for the work they do on difficult sexual misconduct investigations as well as UNHCR's senior management for their strong support for a zero-tolerance approach. Leadership is the crucial element to providing a safe and protected environment for victims to report.

I conclude my remarks on sexual misconduct by noting that UNHCR's global and complex operations will continue to generate such cases. The rate of incidents also reflects efforts in confidence building in UNHCR's complaints systems. Despite these efforts, I do remain concerned that underreporting persists, and we can always do more. I and my Office will continue our efforts in policy and practice in this regard.

IGO strategy

Your excellencies, I want to turn to my Office's strategy and its implementation. The IGO's strategy for 2021-2026 has been finalised. The overall intended outcome is to ensure that 'UNHCR has an effective independent oversight system giving confidence to UNHCR's stakeholders over UNHCR's efficiency, economy and effectiveness'. This will be achieved through oversight delivery and coordination; and investigations.

Oversight coordination

On oversight coordination, my Office seeks to ensure that independent oversight work is coordinated, understood and, most importantly, that it results in organisational learning.

I note improving coordination between all oversight providers, in particular between my Office, the Evaluation Service and the OIOS internal audit service. There are now regular and meaningful meetings and exchanges; a consolidated online oversight plan; and enhanced reporting to management on oversight matters. We have also set out a clear operational model of how my Office intends to interact with each oversight provider and UNHCR management, to ensure effective coordination and oversight.

Under new leadership, UNHCR's internal audit service has an opportunity and a commitment to further modernise their work to seize the opportunities presented by UNHCR's improving risk maturity. I am pleased to note OIOS has recovered ground with reporting in the last few months and I look forward to their planned return to the field in the last quarter of this year.

On understanding oversight work, we have analysed the output of oversight providers in 2020. This concluded that overall, the scale and scope of findings did not significantly alter in 2020 from 2019 and that, generally, UNHCR's operations managed pandemic risks to delivery well. Several issues and risks persist, however, many of which are to be addressed through the transformation and change process.

On learning, we have supported the UNHCR management team's improved closure of recommendations from oversight providers and are exploring how to integrate follow up across all oversight providers.

Investigations

Your excellencies, turning to my Office's work on investigations. We continue to receive increased numbers of complaints. From a plateau of around 1,200 per annum in the last three years, we are predicting around 1,500 by the end of 2021. The profile of complaints, in terms of type and geography remain as for prior years. For investigations our substantiation rate increased slightly to 58%.

My Office's strategy for investigations work comprises refining the scope of our work; delivery enhancement; and ensuring organisational learning and prevention.

On scope, we are working with management colleagues on a new triage mechanism designed to address workplace challenges more appropriately, earlier, and through a management-led response. This should enable my Office to focus resources on its core mandate of misconduct. Additionally, we are finalising the transfer of the review of *prima facie* cases of protection against retaliation from the Ethics Office to the IGO. Further work is ongoing to refine links with management colleagues on financial fraud, resettlement fraud, and misconduct committed by implementing partners.

We continue to improve our investigations, including enhancing open-source searching, upgrading our case management system, improving complaints intake, and increasing our digital forensics capacity. We are also working on policy issues around witness protection and the Speak Up helpline. We continue to be stretched, but are pursuing organisational efficiency, and we look forward to policy changes around the handling of workplace challenges in particular to provide at least some relief.

On learning, the Investigation Service continues to issue management implication reports, short notes issued to UNHCR management colleagues to draw lessons from complaints and investigations. 11 MIRs were issued in the first half of 2021. We are enhancing our statistical data reporting to support Regional Bureaux and country representatives in oversight and handling of operational issues from investigations.

Oversight of UNHCR

Finally, I want to note that UNHCR has embarked on a range of organisational development activities to make UNHCR organisationally 'fit' to respond to global demands and challenges. Specifically, the next phase of risk management maturity; finalising regionalisation and decentralisation; a business transformation change programme changing major operational processes including the supporting IT systems; enhancing implementing partner oversight; and embedding of a results-based management approach.

As Inspector General, I consider these organisational development responses to be appropriate but note, along with other oversight providers, that this is a significant change programme in scale and pace of change. I and my oversight colleagues will continue to review these change programmes closely, to both support and assure their delivery.

Conclusion

In closing, *Distinguished Delegates*, I continue to give my thanks to you for your support and engagement in my Office's work and my strategic mission to ensure efficient and effective independent oversight at UNHCR.

Thank you.