



Mr. Vice-Chair,
Mr. High Commissioner, Mrs. Deputy High-Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to take the floor as the new Chair of the Global Staff Council. I would like to share with you the main concerns of UNHCR personnel around the globe, and the objectives that will guide our work in the coming years.

Humanitarian work continues to be complicated by new waves and variants of COVID, extreme weather patterns and political strife. However, despite all the challenges, we are proud of the UNHCR workforce who stayed behind and delivered in some of the most difficult and often remote field locations. All focusing on one main objective: to serve and protect our persons of concern. This is yet another proof of the extraordinary commitment of UNHCR staff. Unfortunately, quite often, this has taken a toll on their physical and mental well-being.

We would like to pay a special tribute to our colleagues in Afghanistan, and in particular the national staff. While still an evolving situation, we continue to keep a close eye on the developments in country and will continue to advocate at all levels for the Duty of Care to be applied.

In the context of return to office, in the many locations where teleworking had become the norm, the Global Staff Council has called on managers to continue to exercise flexibility and understanding, to protect the welfare of staff.

As in previous years, the number one priority for UNHCR staff is the granting of longer-term contracts. We will continue to advocate with persistence for contracts that go beyond the current maximum three-years duration. 75% of staff hold Fixed-Term Appointments and another 13% hold temporary contracts. This means nearly 90% of the staff hold appointments of limited duration, with far too many living precariously on year-to-year contracts. The last indefinite contracts were awarded in 2008 and 15 years down the line, no staff have received an appointment of more than 3 years. And this does not even include colleagues who have been serving five or more years as Affiliate Workforce.

This has had obvious consequences on the lives of colleagues who cannot make long term personal and professional plans. This may include for example a breastfeeding mother having to leave her baby behind as she returns to a non-family hardship duty station, for fear that she may otherwise lose her job. Or a staff member who would like to undertake external studies, opportunities that in the past may have been facilitated through special leave without pay. Lastly, you have the real situation of all forms of abuses against staff, who cannot complain for fear of reprisal, to include the non-extension of their contract.

The unfortunate reality is that these are not suppositions, within UNHCR such cases abound. Retaliation through the non-renewal of a contract does exist. Longer-term contracts will not only provide a sense of stability and belonging but will also translate into a workforce that is confident to speak up on issues such as harassment, racism, and abuse of authority. In real terms, the lack of longer-term contracts has become a risk for the agency.



Furthermore, this situation undermines the trust that staff have for the organization, which UNHCR must count on to protect the refugees, its operations and ultimately its reputation. A high level of integrity is expected from each of us to prevent cases of abuse, corruption and sexual misconduct, as unfortunately experienced by a sister agency recently. Therefore, there needs to be a strong foundation, built on the diversity of its staff to include gender, race and sexual orientation, their ability to speak up without fear and the confidence they have in their role within UNHCR.

Another key objective is the fight against all forms of abuse and discrimination. Abuse of authority is unfortunately an issue that is also undermining the work we do. When the pattern of abusive behavior is repeated, and despite all manner of coaching the abuse continues and the staff member remains in the organization and even gets promoted, the perceived level of impunity becomes unacceptable. The mental and physical well-being of staff needs to be prioritized over the so-called 'operational needs' of the organization.

We will be advocating for diversity and inclusion at all levels and within decision making bodies for them to be fully representative and for the culture and spirit of the UN to be fully realized. There is also a need to avoid the creation of silos in the regions and in HQs and to promote diversity of nationalities and origins.

In addition, proper consideration should be given to career progression of internal staff of diverse origins who could be assigned to higher functions instead of recruiting externally. For instance, the conversion of national staff to international positions could help address the gaps in geographical representation among professional staff. Unfettered external hiring is likely to create more SIBA situations, leading to personnel demotivation and a growing clash of professional cultures.

There is also a growing feeling that competencies of well experienced colleagues are no longer valued, leading long serving staff out the door. While we agree that "new blood" is essential to bring specific expertise, the organization should not do away with colleagues who have supported operations across the globe in the last 20 years or more and have an invaluable wealth of multi-disciplinary experience. Long serving staff (national and international) are an essential part of the blood and flesh of UNHCR.

Meanwhile, it may be time to start looking at the initial results of regionalization and decentralization started in 2019 by the organization. At the Staff Council level, we have gone through our own transformation from a Council that was often considered as HQ centered to a global council that is now formed of fifteen members, half of whom are the chairs of recently established Regional Staff Associations. We are particularly pleased that the High Commissioner is releasing an Administrative Instruction on Staff Representation that is supporting our strategy to ensure recognition of the official role of Staff Representatives, in the field, regions and HQs.

Our hope is to further bring the concerns of the staff to the table and to work genuinely and with pragmatism on these. With your support, we would like to make UNHCR a better place to work for all colleagues.

Thank you.