

## UNHCR 71<sup>st</sup> EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Statement by Lori Bell (7-10 minutes / 4-5 pages)

Head of Evaluation Service

Mr. Vice Chairman, Deputy High Commissioner, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The very act of standing in front of you, in person, to speak about the work of the Evaluation Service feels like a particular privilege this year. A year that has shown us both the importance of critically assessing organisational results and of finding creative ways to provide this independent scrutiny.

The pandemic has influenced our work – both what we do ... and how we do it. We have pivoted, enabling us to do more remotely – completing 13 evaluations and starting another 27. But full rigorous assessment of performance still requires boots on the ground, particularly when it comes to getting feedback from Government partners, community organizations and persons of concern. I am pleased to say that to date in 2021 we have been able to carry out face-to-face missions in Niger, South Africa, Zambia, Sudan and Costa Rica.

Amongst other priorities, we are focussing on the COVID-19 response, joining in a UN system-wide evaluation of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and, jointly with a number of countries (notably Finland, Colombia and Uganda) leading a second global evaluation on the protection of the rights of refugees during the pandemic.

Through evaluations, we have learned that COVID-19 has represented both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge insofar as the crisis has, in some operations, resulted in UNHCR having to deprioritize more developmentally focussed activities in order to respond to acute COVID-19 needs.

At the same time, independent evaluations point to a number of countries in which UNHCR's pre-existing partnerships with development actors contributed to greater

inclusion of refugees in national COVID-19 responses. We will be publishing these and other COVID-19 related findings in a new series of quarterly briefs.

We note that evaluations undertaken over the past years have been contributing to change across the organization in three principal ways.

First, they **provide assurance and validation** of the organization's direction and strategy.

A good example of this is the recently completed evaluation of UNHCR's engagement with humanitarian-development cooperation. In light of global commitments made under the GCR, the evaluation finds that institutional measures taken to date have led to **closer collaboration with development actors** which are beginning to show concrete results.

Two concrete examples. An evaluation case study in **Jordan** shows us that UNHCR's efforts to get work permit for refugees has not only increases household income but has resulted in improved protection. In **Ethiopia**, cooperation with development actors has resulted in increased access to legal services in Gambella, benefitting both refugees and host communities.

A second way that evaluations contribute to change is by **generating new knowledge and pointing the organization in new directions**.

Again two specific examples:

UNHCR's response to cyclone Idai revealed critical policy-implementation gaps, and the need to strengthen our engagement in emergency preparedness. It also highlighted, however, the important role UNHCR has to play in asserting the **centrality** of protection in situations of natural disasters. These lessons are being taken seriously: I believe that you heard more about the evaluation yesterday at the climate change side event – and current efforts to update UNHCR's Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response, and to mainstreaming climate action across its portfolio of work.

Our evaluation of UNHCR's regional response to the crisis in Venezuela validated and showcased a number of good practices in the use of remote approaches to reach refugees

during the crisis, such as extending hotlines and chatbots and providing virtual cash support, that warrant wider replication in the context of COVID-19 and beyond.

A third and final way that evaluations can contribute to organizational change is by **providing evidence that may be contrary to commonly-held views** and arguing for transformation.

Our evaluation of UNHCR's approach to **workforce learning and development** acknowledged many positive shifts brought about by the organizations' People Strategy (2016-2021) but advocated, going forward, for a more decentralised, flexible and demand-driven approach to UNHCRs support for learning. Not all of the recommendations from this evaluation have been accepted by management but, of those that were, significant changes are already in progress including a revised learning policy and piloting of a field-support unit with regional talent development advisors.

A second example of a rather hard-hitting evaluation, is the just-completed Statelessness evaluation, where the evidence shows that current approaches are unlikely to eliminate statelessness by the end of the global campaign. The evaluation presses for important increases in UNHCR resources, both human and financial, for the organizations statelessness work - and further leveraging of partnerships through global, regional and country coalitions. Management has agreed with almost all of the recommendations and an action plan has been agreed.

The Evaluation Service has itself been evaluated this year - an exercise that reminds us what it feels like to be the ones under scrutiny.

The Professional Peer Review of UNHCR's evaluation function reaffirmed that **the evaluation policy and strategy are a good fit for the organization and that the function has been maturing gradually over the past 5 years**. The Peer Review panel, which included senior representatives from two member states - Denmark and the US - nevertheless pointed to new directions that UNHCR might take that are aligned with other multi and bilateral organizations with respect to the independence and resourcing

of the function and made a number of useful recommendations in technical areas related to evaluation planning and implementation.

The panel also cautioned the Evaluation Service on the **pace of change**. It encouraged a carefully sequenced expansion of evaluations commissioned at the regional and country level that complements and supports the RBM roll-out and ongoing reforms related to decentralization and multi-year planning.

Key agreed follow up actions from the Peer Review will be embedded in the new Evaluation Policy which I will be pleased to share with you in due course.

A last area of significant achievement worth highlighting has been the harmonization of efforts with other parts of UNHCR that play an important oversight role, including the Inspector General's Office and internal audit.

We have been working to create a 'One-Stop Shop' for oversight, starting with a common planning system, designed to avoid overlaps and duplication between oversight activities – with a new single system to follow up on management responses not far behind.

The common recommendations tracking system will allow management across the organization to see, respond to and report on recommendations made by all oversight providers.

Looking forward, the next 12 months look very exciting.

- A Spotlight session at the High Level Officials Meeting, co-hosted by DRS and the Evaluation Service, will take a hard look at the evidence on what has been working - and what has not - for refugees during the COVID-19 crisis.
- We will expand our support for decentralized evaluation through the planned deployment of Senior Regional Evaluation Officers in several new regions.
- This will go hand in hand with evaluation capacity development, that will tackle both aspects of supply of and demand for evaluation.

As we improve our engagement and ensure that evaluation responds to need and demand, I am confident you will find some of the new topics for next year of great interest.

Upcoming evaluations of our **IDP and GBV policies** map directly onto the organisation's updated Strategic Directions and 8 focus areas. As these are both recent policies, our evaluations will play an important role in identifying areas of excellence and prompting early course correction.

Finally, and because it has come up in a number of ExCom related events, I wanted to mention that we have scheduled an evaluation to look at the results of UNHCR's regionalization and decentralization for 2023.

I would like take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Member States that have engaged and contributed to the performance of the evaluation function over the last year - and would welcome your expressions of interest to participate in any of the upcoming planned evaluations for 2022/23.

thank you very much for your attention.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions or suggestions you might have and remind you that the evaluation workplan, all evaluation reports and their management responses are published on our website.

(1,354 words – 8 minutes)