

SAFETY AND SECURITY ISSUES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In their call to respond effectively to the "humanitarian imperative", aid workers must increasingly confront precarious and often unpredictably hostile environments to assist and protect refugees and other victims of conflict. There can hardly be a more stark portrayal of the inherent risks than by the brutal killings last September of four UNHCR staff members in Indonesia and Guinea, followed by the abduction of three UNHCR colleagues in Guinea and Sudan. Similar tragedies have affected other humanitarian agencies: the killings of UNICEF workers in Burundi in 2000 and the murders of ICRC staff in Chechnya (Russian Federation) in 1999, to name just two of the more recent incidents. In the aftermath of these tragedies, the Office has redoubled efforts to forge a more coherent and responsive approach to security management. A comprehensive review conducted in late 2000 underscored the importance of mainstreaming security responsibilities and capacities within the Office, of becoming more pro-active in the management of security, and of establishing and maintaining operational security standards.

2. This conference room paper addresses key developments that are being undertaken to reinforce the safety and security of both field staff and the populations under UNHCR's care, providing an update of the information notes presented at the eighteenth meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2000 (EC/50/SC/INF.3 and EC/50/SC/INF.4), the *Note on Safety and Security of Staff* prepared for the nineteenth meeting of Standing Committee in September 2000, as well as subsequent informal consultations on staff security.

II. EMERGENCY AND SECURITY SERVICE

3. In recognition of the increasingly linkages between security management and emergency operations, UNHCR established in December 2000 the Emergency and Security Service (ESS). Under a newly-appointed Director, ESS is located within the Executive Office, reporting directly to the High Commissioner, and comprises the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section and the Field Safety Section. ESS coordinates all aspects of the Office's management of emergency preparedness and response as well as the safety and security of staff and refugees. The Service is also the Office's focal point on other relevant issues such as civil-military cooperation, landmines, small arms, and improved coordination in complex emergencies.

4. While the reinforcement of UNHCR's overall response in security and emergency management remains among the Office's foremost objectives, this paper is limited to issues of staff and refugee security, and should be read in parallel with *Emergency Preparedness and Response* (EC/51/SC/CRP.4).

III. ENHANCING STAFF SECURITY

5. In late 2000, the Office undertook a thorough review of all existing staff security policies. Under the direction of the Assistant High Commissioner, a Task Force on Staff Security was established which produced a detailed report of its findings, as well as specific recommendations for the enhancement of staff security which were endorsed by senior management in late November. These were subsequently shared during the informal consultations on security in December 2000. In an effort to ensure tangible progress in the short term, the Assistant High Commissioner has appointed a focal point within the Executive Office to assist him with implementation of this initiative.

6. Action to reinforce and strengthen staff and refugee security focus on three key areas:
- (i) Mainstreaming responsibilities and capacities for security within the Office;
 - (ii) Supporting pro-active security management; and
 - (iii) Establishing and maintaining standards of security in UNHCR's operations.

A. Mainstreaming Security Responsibilities and Capacities

7. The review determined that there was a need to better systematize UNHCR's security training procedures and ensure that training being conducted in the field should be better focused and targeted. A recommendation was made to study other approaches than those used hitherto. To the extent possible UNHCR should try to emulate the ICRC process of educating staff, enabling them to assume individual responsibility for their own safety. The objective is to foster a culture of safety by mainstreaming safety and security into all of UNHCR's operations.

8. Three specific initiatives are underway. In the short term, efforts will focus on field offices confronted by serious safety and security situations. Their staff will undergo enhanced safety and security training, which will be complemented by a tailored package of training modules. This programme is expected to be delivered in six months. An experienced security professional from amongst UNHCR's existing staff will be dedicated to developing the core curriculum, building on existing training modules. Other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organization (NGO) humanitarian partners, as well as UNSECOORD will provide input. The tailored packages will be situation-specific to ensure that the training is relevant to each venue. For example, a module on convoy security will be provided for staff engaged in organizing convoys, and another on camp security for staff who face problems in refugee camps. In due course, this training will be mandatory prior to assignment to high-risk duty stations.

9. The second initiative involves the development of an inter-active CD-ROM on safety and security principles and practices, again with input from other United Nations agencies. This tool will also be used by Field Security Officers (FSO) in the security training for all staff (both international and national) in dangerous duty stations. Refresher courses will be provided at set intervals to ensure a continuous updating and reinforcement of security skills.

10. The third element concerns the mainstreaming of personal responsibility for one's own security in UNHCR's operating environment. UNHCR will be requiring all Heads of Office in hazardous duty stations (security phase II and above) to draft a security protocol. The security protocol will identify the security rules at the duty station (in conjunction with guidelines set forth by the Designated Official, the Area Security Coordinator and, as appropriate, host government authorities) and contain an agreement clause which international and national staff members will be required to sign, acknowledging that a breach of the protocol will result in administrative or disciplinary measures.

B. Pro-active Security Management

11. The review undertaken in 2000 concluded that UNHCR's current security structure was adequate in reacting to security situations, but should become more pro-active. Managers were unable to monitor situations closely nor adequately anticipate increasing danger to allow them to take preventative action.

12. As a result, the Field Safety Section (FSS) will reinforce its capacity to analyse developments in those areas of the world where it is believed staff might currently or in the near future be most at risk. This will include a close review of available information as well as more systematic contact with sources of information on the ground by FSOs and other United Nations, NGO and local security experts. Rosters of staff and implementing partners at duty stations will be closely monitored to ensure accurate knowledge of who is present and who should be evacuated if necessary. An updated evacuation plan and evaluation of the minimum operational safety standards will also be systematically maintained. In addition, a weekly brief on these locations will be maintained and a more developed quarterly analysis will be instituted to provide senior managers with a better understanding of the dynamics of a situation.

13. The need for UNHCR representatives in the field to make more effective use of the United Nations inter-agency Security Management Team (SMT) is another area where improvements are being pursued. The SMT is chaired by the Designated Official (DO) for Security and is the structure through which all security decisions for a duty station must be vetted. Securing UNHCR's presence is therefore crucial, so that UNHCR's operational concerns can be raised and addressed.

14. An evaluation of security management in offices targeted for the tailored security training is also underway, designed to assess the adequacy of current security resources and procedures, and make recommendations for improvements, if required, with time lines for compliance.

C. Establishment of Security Standards

15. Pressures imposed by the need for rapid deployment, local conditions and/or funding constraints tended to have resulted in a lack of standardized and consistent security benchmarks in the field. This can no longer be tolerated. The need for minimum operational security standards is now acknowledged by all humanitarian agencies working in the field. Based on the five security phases, UNSECOORD and several humanitarian agencies have determined a set of minimum operational security standards which will be presented to the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to be held in Paris in May 2001. These standards set forth minimum acceptable levels for communications infrastructure, safety equipment, evacuation, training requirements and interaction among the United Nations agencies and implementing partners on the ground.

16. The adoption of minimum operational security standards will have significant implications for both resources and operations. Additional funds will be required for communication and safety equipment as a necessary condition for continuing operations. Once the standards are incorporated in the United Nations Field Security guidelines, any failure to comply will have legal implications with regard to the Malicious Acts Insurance Policy which covers United Nations staff in a given area.

17. The cost of maintaining minimum operational security standards is expected to be absorbed by the operational agencies. UNHCR, with its large number of field staff in high risk areas, expects to see an increase in security-related costs. Nevertheless, the Office is continuing its efforts to

place these costs under the United Nations Regular Budget. Cost sharing will therefore only take place while these efforts are being pursued.

IV. REFUGEE SECURITY

18. The Office has recognized that staff security needs to be linked with the issue of refugee and returnee security. The "ladder of options" framework, described in an information note on the security of refugee camps and settlements (EC/50/SC/INF.4), provides a pragmatic approach for responding to the security needs of refugees and, by association, humanitarian workers in precarious situations. One element of this framework consists of the identification, training, and eventual deployment of HSOs who could support the Office in assessing, establishing, and implementing an effective mechanism of refugee and returnee security. In this regard, an understanding has been reached with the United Nations Department of Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO). Under this agreement, DPKO will dispatch assessment missions to those situations where the security situation confronting refugees may escalate and threaten regional peace and security, and will provide for their support whenever possible to help stabilize the situation.

19. UNHCR considers the support of donor countries to be critical to enhance UNHCR's capacity to ensure the security of refugees. The Office has developed specific terms of reference for HSOs which have been shared with several governments who expressed interest in this issue. Despite the positive reactions, no substantial support has yet been forthcoming. Recognizing the legal and operational complexities of implementing such an initiative, the Office will be renewing its contacts with governments on this important question. In the meantime, UNHCR will continue to be confronted with situations where the security of refugees is threatened by ongoing conflicts, such as the situation faced by refugees from Sierra Leone in Guinea.

V. CONCLUSION

20. The various measures already underway or about to be undertaken are all designed to create an ethic of security in UNHCR. They are wide-ranging and practical, and concern the conduct of operations both at Headquarters and in the field. They complement the work of other concerned agencies and are being undertaken in full coordination with those agencies. In this context, UNHCR is highly appreciative of the recent initiatives put forward by UNSECOORD to strengthen staff security. There is clearly a need for rapid action on such initiatives, in view of the importance of the issue at stake, while working towards a more satisfactory overall solution within the United Nations system.