

83rd Meeting of the Standing Committee

March 2022

Statement by Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning / afternoon. This committee meeting marks the commencement of my third year as UNHCR's Inspector General. I had hoped to focus today on how oversight colleagues have continued to perform during another year of the pandemic and on their plans to resume more on-site presence now that it, hopefully, nears its conclusion; and I will do that. As you will be aware, however, UNHCR is handling an unprecedented number of emergencies and scale of humanitarian need at present.

It is the instinct of all humanitarians, including those working in the oversight professions, to want to rush in and assist those in urgent need. In that context, at present, there is a risk that oversight becomes a footnote, both organizationally and in governance terms, to current emergencies.

As a lifelong oversight professional, I would ask for your continued focus on the oversight agenda. I would like to emphasize that oversight helps UNHCR's management, to strengthen – over time – UNHCR's capacity to handle humanitarian challenges with integrity. Independent oversight providers, including the IGO, seek to ensure that UNHCR is strong, well-managed, well-governed and resilient during emergencies. We do this through collegial, but independent, support of management oversight, assurance, learning, development, systems strengthening and, if necessary, accountability.

My presentation today will, therefore, focus on activities undertaken by the IGO in 2021 on the oversight coordination and investigations agenda, to complement my paper.

Delivery of the IGO's mandate

Your Excellencies, the IGO's mandate and work continues to be guided by UNHCR's *Policy on Independent Oversight*. In short, to ensure independent oversight is greater than the sum of its parts and

that UNHCR staff and contractors act with accountability and integrity. This means that, in terms of strategic oversight, we coordinate the plans and activities of independent oversight providers and analyse findings to ensure organizational learning. For investigations, we have worked on strengthening UNHCR's integrity systems, in partnership with other integrity entities and management; on independent investigations of misconduct; and on recommending enhancements to UNHCR's practices to learn from each integrity breach.

Oversight coordination

Oversight coordination during the past year focused on ensuring the synchronized plans of oversight providers for 2021 were delivered. For 2022 we are seeking to ensure oversight providers return to the field in an optimal way, as travel restrictions are eased. My Office has taken actions to ensure that coordination is more than simply avoiding duplication or gaps, but also that each oversight provider undertakes the right tasks for their skillset, and that lines of enquiry and risk coverage fit together coherently. My Office has also been working with UNHCR's Internal Audit Service in OIOS, to modernize and modify their audit approach in accordance with UNHCR's improved risk maturity.

I am pleased to report strong collegial and meaningful cooperation between the independent oversight providers, leading to the development of a coherent oversight plan for 2022. A collective oversight approach has been agreed to UNHCR's business transformation programme; the modernization of IT systems and key operational processes. Whilst I said earlier oversight risks being a footnote during emergencies, as it is a longer-term risk, rather than issue based effort; in fact oversight providers are also discussing their approach to UNHCR's humanitarian response in Ukraine and surrounding countries actively. Innovative, real-time and coordinated approaches are being developed to support UNHCR management to address assurance, integrity and protection risks in live time.

The IGO continues to act as the point of UNHCR's contact and liaison for OIOS and for the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit. It also continues to provide secretariat support to the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee (IAOC) during three sessions in 2021, including for their first in-person meeting since 2019, in November.

The IGO has also systematized and regularized the provision of oversight information to UNHCR's senior management by issuing a quarterly 'oversight of oversight' report. These reports, targeted at Directors of Headquarters Divisions and Regional Bureaux, as well as Country Representatives, have been designed to enhance learning from oversight work; share best practice; and support UNHCR's decentralization and regionalization by providing high-level investigations data and trends to assist the Bureaux in their management oversight responsibilities.

Organizational learning

Your Excellencies, one of my Office's objectives is to ensure institutional learning and enhancement from oversight work, through the analysis of findings.

My Office undertook an advisory review of second line oversight within UNHCR, in the context of regionalization and decentralization. This placed management oversight within an overall architecture of control frameworks as well as the organizational restructuring and the business transformation programme, in order to support development of appropriate oversight tools. The analysis confirmed my view, aligned to the Deputy High Commissioner's, that UNHCR's organizational change programme is the right and critical course of action to significantly enhance UNHCR's economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

My Office has now commenced training in qualitative data analysis, supported by a data analysis tool, to deepen the quality of our review of oversight work. This is intended to enable me to deliver better quality analysis and enhanced learning from oversight work. I will revert in future on this initiative.

To enhance organizational strengthening and learning from investigations, the IGO issued 40 management implication reports in 2021. These focused (internal) memoranda drew management's attention to generalizable observations based on our investigations and are targeted at the relevant UNHCR colleagues to address root causes. They are also shared with selected oversight colleagues to inform their work.

I have also issued thematic oversight analyses from my missions to Uganda and to the Regional Bureau in MENA and operations in Jordan and Lebanon.

Delivery of integrity response

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

My paper outlines the key investigations statistics for 2021. Notably, my Office saw a 27% increase in registered complaints during the year to 1,450. We expect a similar number for 2022. This reflects the positive work undertaken by colleagues to build confidence in UNHCR's complaints mechanisms and the credibility of our response. The geographical concentration of complaints reflects those UNHCR operations with the strongest refugee accountability mechanisms. The top three complaints categories remained – as in 2020 – financial fraud, resettlement fraud, and sexual exploitation and/or abuse.

Based on the IGO's complaint-by-complaint assessment, 44% of registered complaints required no further action. We investigated 8% of complaints and referred 45% to others, including partners, for action. We received 150 complaints regarding sexual exploitation and 52 related to sexual harassment for which the victim and/or the alleged perpetrator was identifiable. Our overall investigation substantiation rate across misconduct types was 50%.

The IGO has taken steps to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our investigative response, given the significant demand on the Investigation Service. We have invested in IT systems by finalizing the upgrade to our case management system and adding remote data extraction capability, thereby reducing the need for field travel and reliance on local IT personnel. As the Deputy High Commissioner referenced in her opening remarks, we have also supported the initiative to improve the handling of workplace challenges which do not amount to misconduct, focusing our resource on misconduct matters. Our online training for partners on how to investigate sexual misconduct was released last year and is publicly available online at disasterready.org

A special project, undertaken at the end of 2021, to address a growing backlog of intake assessments, resulted in a near contemporaneous intake pipeline by year-end by switching resources to intake and

refreshing our intake procedures to be more discerning. The IGO's investigations team also undertook a full professional development programme, including training in handling of sexual misconduct cases and open-source data search.

My Office intends to create some limited, proactive investigation space for 2022, and to continue our work with management on the IGO's role over particular misconduct types.

Conclusion

In closing, *Distinguished Delegates*, I am pleased to report that, with a welcome return to field, my Office will reinstate face-to-face work with UNHCR staff and partners on oversight and investigations matters. I would like to express my continued deep appreciation for your strong interest in, and support of, my Office's work, as I believe it is integral to UNHCR's organizational resilience and strength.

Thank you.

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