

Agenda Item 4(a)

Standing Committee 59th meeting - Staff safety and security

Overview

UNHCR strives to ensure that the organization can stay and deliver to our persons of concern while ensuring the safety of its staff. This is an ever increasing challenge, as security environments change continuously and require a deft and robust response, both to manage and review the security risk and devise appropriate security mitigation measures in addition to preparing staff. Efforts to strengthen safety and security for UNHCR continue in line with the 2013-2015 plan of action for security management focussing on strengthening a culture of security.

Delivering in High Risk Environments:

Since I have had the privilege of being appointed to this post in September last year, our staff on the ground have faced the following security situations: in Cameroon, two colleagues were held hostage in a refugee camp; our Representative in Somalia and 3 other colleagues survived a vehicle-borne suicide bomb thanks to the skills of our driver and the armoured vehicle, sadly locals passing by did not escape. Our drivers and protection staff were caught in fire during the Homs evacuations, our colleagues in Yida in South Sudan barely managed to board the plane as armed youths circled the airport and an NGO colleague was savagely attacked and lost his life. Two weeks ago in Mogadishu, a bomb attack on a UNHCR convoy affected seven staff and resulted in light injuries to several people. Last Friday, our head of emergencies and an inter-agency mission undertaking the operational peer review in the Central African Republic were stopped and circled by an Anti Balaka group high on drugs, they escaped thanks to the negotiating skills of our senior colleague who had been deployed to support our L3 emergency response. And here I have focused on UNHCR staff only, without mentioning the tragedy in Kabul on the 17th of January which resulted in the loss of 21 lives of UN and other international organization's staff.

Staying and delivering is increasingly taking us closer and closer to the edge. It requires nerves of steel, highly skilled and well trained staff, from the driver to

the senior staff member. Preparedness and effective business continuity plans are essential to meet our responsibilities in situations where we have to leave, combined with agility and flexibility to return as soon as possible. This requires investment in our staff and the assets which will allow us to be highly flexible, combined with a high level of corporate responsibility whereby staff are closely accompanied and cared for so that they are not alone during these critical moments. You have asked us to stay and deliver and we have committed to doing so. In many contexts, we are asked to do more and deliver more, and this requires a clear duty of care and an understanding by all of the level of risks that we are facing.

Preparedness and response to complex security situations

To ensure that we are prepared in the best way possible to face such situations, the Field Safety Section deployed some 30 missions to provide guidance and to review security measures and assist operations to stay and deliver.

Having a dedicated Structural Engineer for Security has proved to be invaluable for the organization in today's security context. In addition to his work for UNHCR, he also provided advice and support to other agencies where feasible, including a review of the UN compound following the attack on the UN facility in Mogadishu in 2013. UNHCR continues to build a diverse security workforce that can meet the demands of its increasingly complex operational context. The number of professional Field Safety Advisers employed by the organization is now 58, with nine new recruitments over the past twelve months. The organization responds to new emergencies with complex security environments by deploying security professionals both from headquarters and within the region, who not only work to ensure security of UNHCR staff, but who are actively involved with supporting the UN Security Management System and the humanitarian community through the 'Saving Lives Together' framework.

DESS/FSS works with new field safety advisors to ensure a skillset that includes analysis, communication skills and security of persons of concern and continues to ensure that all security personnel within the organization receive training in these subjects. Part of our approach to security also focuses on

ensuring that we are accepted by communities, that we are clear in delivering on what we promise and that we maintain a neutral and impartial approach to our operations.

Management, policy and oversight

The dynamic nature of the working environment demands regular review of security posture and allocation of resources. Following a United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services audit on security resource management in 2012, UNHCR is working to reaffirm the necessity for appropriate security budgeting and accountability. As a part of this, FSS reviews all Country Operations Plan documents as part of the Annual Programme Review to ensure that the security context is adequately addressed and resources allocated correspond with the needs; while FSS also works with operations to ensure that appropriate security resources are also reflected for new emergency situations.

Interagency Partnership

UNHCR works within the inter-agency security management network (IASMN) that establishes policy for United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. DESS/FSS engages with UNDSS on policy issues to ensure that UNHCR operational concerns are adequately reflected in policies and practice while also maintaining continuous discussion both on the ground with the Designated Official and Security Management Teams and with UNDSS NY as situations evolve. We also participate in inter-agency missions with one about to take place in Afghanistan and coordinate closely with security colleagues in contexts such as CAR.

Training

In order to ensure a culture of security, the organization prepares and trains both staff and managers for changing security environments. In 2014, Security staff will undergo specialized training in mitigation measures, risk communication, and the security of persons of concern. An e- Learning Course on security for persons of concern will be released for all staff in the coming months. Training is also organized for drivers, who are exposed to particular

risk and challenges, and their commitment and driving skills have proven to be critical to saving lives.

Conclusion

UNHCR remains committed to delivering in challenging security environments while ensuring that appropriate risk mitigation measures and security procedures are in place, in order to protect the well-being of its staff, partners and persons of concern. To do this well, with the corresponding duty of care, your continued interest and support are vital.

FSS/DESS

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