

76th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme

Introductory remarks to item 2.b.iii – UNHCR Reforms
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
Room A, WIPO
18-19 September 2019

Mister Chairperson,
Excellencies,

We have received, over recent years, various 'nudges' to reform parts of the organisation, the way in which we work, and how we deliver protection and solutions to the people we serve. Some of these have come from within, others driven by external developments. Taken together, a consensus emerged that UNHCR needed to renew itself, build on its strengths, and update functions to meet future challenges and seize opportunities.

In the broadest sense, the origins of this transformation date back to 2016. Internally, Representatives articulated a strong call to High Commissioner Grandi for a headquarters which was more responsive to the needs of the field, forcing a reflection on how the organization functions. Externally the adoption of the New York Declaration, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework which accompanied it, launched an expansive dialogue on how to develop a Global Compact on Refugees to change how the international community responds to refugee crises and forced displacement globally, and through this, how UNHCR operates.

Three years on, the concept is turning into concrete transformation. The Global Compact was endorsed and is being implemented, while new Regional Bureaux have been created and Bureau colleagues are taking up their new positions in the field. And although we have briefed you at every Standing Committee, amongst other fora, in the intervening years – the Global Compact was, of course, developed through its own extensive consultation process - this is also a moment to take stock of progress made and to clarify the scope of this reform process, as it transcends the Compact and Regionalization.

The Conference Room Paper on UNHCR's Reform process attempts these two goals, elaborating in particular detail the regionalization and decentralization process, while also outlining the other seven work streams that, together, comprise this transformation. Regionalization and decentralization is, in a sense, the tip of the iceberg, a complex structural reform which has been undertaken in large part by a lean change team operating under the sterling leadership of the Director of Change, Daisy Dell, who joins me today.

The purpose of this work stream, as we have discussed in previous meetings, is to reinforce country offices, redesign Regional Bureaux, and refocus the role of the Divisions. As the paper elucidates, this is not only about locations and positions but is about the roles, accountabilities and authorities of these various entities, and of the personnel working within them.

A couple of weeks ago, we held a kick-off workshop with our senior team to equip the new Regional Bureaux with the information and motivation they need to take the regionalization process forward successfully. In addition to essential discussions on culture, communication and coordination, there was considerable emphasis on the policy changes we are making to ensure Representatives, Heads of Office and Bureau Directors have greater authority to make faster, more agile and more responsive decisions closer to the field.

These delegations of authorities mean that Country Representatives will now have the authority to make structural changes, including the opening or closing of field offices at country level. They also mean that for the first time, Heads of Sub-Office will have certain formal delegated authorities for position and budget management.

We have also aligned the procurement and supply processes and architecture with the new decentralized organizational design, including through the mandatory establishment of seven Regional Asset Management Boards and Contracts Committees. Together, they clarify and simplify rules and procedures, spell out the roles and responsibilities of different actors at all levels, and establish new thresholds governing procurement and asset management.

Finally, we have revised Human Resource-related authorities, by delegating authority to Regional Bureau Directors to approve P1 to P4 level appointments and assignments in field operations; delegating authority to Regional Bureau Directors and Country Representatives for the normal extensions of select temporary appointments and standard assignments; and rationalized our Regional Assignment Committees down from 17 to one for each of the seven Bureaux.

These new delegated authorities will come into effect on January 1, 2020, as our new field-based Bureaux will then have a full contingent of personnel filling core functions, and benefit from the outcome of the previously mentioned kick off meetings to take the regionalization process forward successfully. This transition will be further aided by the presence of Senior Regional Liaison Officers in the office of the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations. These colleagues (commencing work on 1 January 2020) will ensure predictability and effectiveness in the day to day communication between Regional Bureaux in the field and Permanent Missions of Executive Committee member states.

Mister Chairperson,

As the paper notes, there are several other interrelated key initiatives that are ongoing within UNHCR and which will contribute to this reform, a few of which – including the Global Refugee Forum, Risk Management 2.0 and People management and Human Resources – have their own dedicated sessions over these two days. I would like however to simply flag a few additional developments beyond what is already in the paper.

First, the High Commissioner has recently endorsed the broad lines of a Data Transformation Strategy, supporting protection and solutions in the coming years. Through the implementation of this Strategy, UNHCR will ensure the availability of trusted, valid, reliable and useful data and information on persons of concern; build and maintain coherent, systematic, responsible and efficient data management; ensure the availability of clear and quality evidence on results and impact of UNHCR interventions, and; ensure partners look to UNHCR for guidance on ethical and responsible approaches to data protection and security.

Relatedly, the Secretary General will inaugurate the World Bank-UNHCR joint Data Centre in early October. This centre will work to ensure population and socioeconomic data are systematically collected and analysed, facilitate open access to forced displacement data, promote innovation to enhance forced displacement data, and strengthen the sustainability of a global data collection system.

Second, as mentioned in the paper, the work on data and digitization will enable and feed the new results-based management (RBM) system and, as we discussed with many of you in a briefing late

last month, will more broadly inform how we plan, prioritize and maximize our impact for the people we serve. The RBM team's focus at the moment is on developing core impact and outcome indicators to populate the new, more flexible and country operation-oriented results framework.

As we've revised the RBM system, we have also conducted a broader review of UNHCR's programme management function, drawing on the findings of the 2016 headquarters review which highlighted a need for the function to be strengthened and for this to bring together aspects of assessment, planning and budgeting. The outcome of this review has now been endorsed by the High Commissioner who has decided to create a new Division, bringing together programme, budget, programme partnership and RBM to help drive a more strategic, coherent and efficient approach to how we plan and manage our work.

The new Division will guide and support strategic planning, including multi-year planning; ensure that annual planning and resource allocation processes are simplified, evidence-based and coherent; strengthen results-based management and reporting/analysis on impact and outcomes; and strengthen partner management and monitoring. In doing so, the new Division will focus on simplifying our processes and tools to plan for and report on outcomes, serving as an engine for strategic thinking, and ensuring that we deliver on the commitment to devolve greater planning, budgeting and resource allocation responsibilities to the Regional Bureaux and country operations.

Third, there is a recognition that we need to bring these various initiatives and strands of change together. To that end, a governance board which I announced at the previous meeting of our Standing Committee tracks progress across the various work streams of our change process, facilitates decision-making on cross-cutting issues, and effects course corrections when and where needed.

As I noted in my opening remarks to this meeting, these are dynamic times for the organisation, with a number of far reaching reforms underway, each tackling complex matters that cut deep into the way in which we operate, deliver protection and solutions to people of concern, and report back to you, the Standing Committee. The paper outlines the fact that some of this change is more cross-cutting in nature, or has built-in relationships and dependencies. In that regard, while we are already a few years into this reform process, its scope is not only more ambitious but much better understood than when we launched it in 2016. The pieces all fit together, we are confident in our direction, appreciate your support, and look forward to remaining engaged with you on this reform process in the coming months.

Thank you.