

92nd Meeting of the Standing Committee

March 2025

Statement by Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning/afternoon. This is my sixth year at UNHCR as its Inspector General. I always reflect, in this meeting, on my experience to date, and take this opportunity to consider the work of the independent oversight providers in 2024, both those providing assurance and those working on integrity issues. I am reminded by this work in 2024 that oversight, good, fully independent, transparent oversight, is a critical part of how healthy, accountable, and well-governed public service organisations work.

In my comments I want to take the opportunity to highlight the important themes arising from independent oversight work in 2024 as I see them, and the work of my Office in particular. These comments are over and above my formal written report, which, as usual, provides a summary of the activities and data for my Office in 2024.

Your excellencies, my Office's strategy 2021-2026 has remained consistent; to ensure the efficiency, economy and effectiveness of UNHCR's independent oversight system, thereby helping to ensure that UNHCR is the best it can be in service of the people it is mandated to serve, and to warrant the continued trust and support of those that invest in its work.

Transparency

One theme of work by my Office in 2024 has been transparency. We have continued to make independent oversight work transparent within UNHCR through our online platforms, available to all UNHCR colleagues. The oversight planner shows all oversight work, whether done by those internal or external to UNHCR in a single plan. A second platform shows the status of all oversight recommendations from all providers, and their follow up status. My Office has its own platform tracking risks and issues reported

arising from investigations, via our management implication reports, of which we issued 38 during the year. My Office has continued to issue an internal quarterly report to UNHCR's directors and senior management, covering all things oversight-related, to ensure learning and value is extracted from the work done.

Externally, we have re-organised my Office's website to include a new complaints form and a video, describing how UNHCR's system of independent oversight works, and the various actors within it. Whilst no more complex than any other international organisation in the public or private sectors, stakeholders may find it useful. We have also created an 'independent oversight portal', gathering in one place all of the publicly-available independent oversight reports relating to UNHCR. My Office is working closely with management colleagues to ensure that, where integrity issues arise, we ensure a 'no-surprises' approach, including integrity briefings, for relevant stakeholders to give comfort that integrity matters are handled robustly.

Fraud waste and abuse of funds

Another theme of my Office's work in 2024 was to step up our efforts on fraud, waste and abuse of UNHCR's funds. My Office continued to work without fear or favour, and finalised 172 investigations in the year, substantiating 51%, of which, 57 related to financial fraud.

We continue to be one of the largest and most professional investigations offices in the UN system, with capacity to handle complex cases, including those relating to sexual misconduct, where UNHCR receives and handles the greatest numbers of SEA complaints across the UN system.

We also proactively tackled fraud, by working with counterpart UN agencies and other funders, to identify 'double dipping' fraud; that is, duplicate expenses charged by dishonest implementing partners to UNHCR and another funder. Several investigations have been concluded during the last 12 months and around \$500,000 of potential losses have been identified and referred for recovery so far. In addition, a number of similar cases are currently under review, and will lead to additional investigations during 2025. Systemic weaknesses identified have been brought to the attention of UNHCR management entities to avoid

reoccurrence. Swift access and information sharing of financial data related to implementing partners are vital to detect fraudulent duplicate claims, and we are therefore leading an effort with our counterparts in the UN system to speed up and facilitate this process.

VFM / efficiency

Distinguished delegates, I, and my Office, are extremely conscious of the need for continuing enhanced value and efficiency of our work. In 2024 we continued to digitise our work, relying on online remote and digital tools, wherever possible and appropriate for our work; for example using digital automated transcriptions for our investigations interviews; and developing a system-leading artificial intelligence intake assessment process.

I am also conscious of the need to be judicious and selective in the investigations we undertake ourselves, and that we rely on UNHCR management, others in the UN system, and implementing partners, to handle complaints matters we refer to them. We have led the UN system in the provision of fraud awareness, investigations training and, in particular, building system-wide capacity to investigate matters, including on sexual misconduct.

Within UNHCR, my Office has continued to work with UNHCR management and other integrity entities, the Ethics Office and Ombudsperson, to ensure that our work deploys the most cost-effective and efficient approach to handle the 2,800 complaints my Office received in the year.

Learning

Excellencies, one important measure of the efficiency and effectiveness of oversight, is ensuring learning from oversight work. For investigations, management implication reports remain our primary tool. My Strategic Oversight team has analysed and reviewed these in the period 2020 to 2024, sharing insights with UNHCR management.

My Strategic Oversight team has also continued to share a range of risk analysis, advice, learning and assurance pieces for the attention of UNHCR's senior management team. Examples include, supporting

analysis of the MOPAN donor assessment; a lessons learned assessment from the events at UNOPS; analysis of the current position on the business transformation programme's progress; and analysis of the accompanying controls framework changes arising from those systems.

Accountability

As an independent Office, my Office continues to be key in supporting the High Commissioner to ensure accountability for maintaining UNHCR's expected high standards of probity, and compliance with rules and procedures. The publicly available disciplinary digest sets out how these standards were enforced in 2024.

Priority themes from 2024

Your excellencies, finally, I want to reflect on what I see as risk themes emerging from independent oversight work in 2024. First, the need for UNHCR to continue enhancing its risk maturity, embedding a real culture of risk management into the day-to-day discourse of management. Second, my consistent theme of improving the control environment, ensuring that activities are delivered and overseen as intended and consistently. Third, capturing efficiencies and savings in a more meaningful, quantifiable and evidenced manner. Fourth, continuing the significant progress in enhancing data quality and governance. Fifth, continuing to strengthen an accountability system and culture; linking to good control and effective management oversight. Finally, enhancing the significant progress already made on seeing independent oversight as a system, both for assurance and integrity, to ensure this specialist and limited resource is deployed to greatest effect.

Conclusion

Excellencies, in conclusion, UNHCR has made progress on its 'Golden thread of transformation' in 2024. The independent oversight system, for assurance and integrity, has accompanied UNHCR on this transformation and my Office is committed to ensuring the highest integrity standards. This should enable

UNHCR to more ably and confidently engage with, and focus on, the increased scrutiny by donors accompanying funds, and its stakeholders, not least the people it is mandated to serve.

Thank you.

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