

**76th Session of the Executive Committee October 2025**  
**Speech, Inspector General's Office Mr. Anthony Garnett,**  
**Inspector General**

*Chairperson*

*Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,*

Good morning / afternoon.

Integrity does count. Despite the nature of my work frequently bringing me into contact with the most challenging things at UNHCR, I have also been privileged to see the bigger picture, of the dedication and commitment of colleagues, often operating under very trying circumstances, to deliver on UNHCR's mandate. In particular, my IGO team has worked to ensure UNHCR has held itself to the highest standards and principles that embody good humanitarian action, not just in words, but in deeds.

This is my valedictory speech as UNHCR's Inspector General, as my fixed term mandate ends in March 2026. Whilst my *Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office* (A/AC.96/75/8) covers the work of my Office in the year to June 2025, I hope, *distinguished delegates*, you will indulge me in a small amount of reflection on my UNHCR experience.

IGO strategy

*Your excellencies*, after commencing my role on day one of the COVID lockdown here in Geneva, I developed my Office's five-year strategy 2021-2026. Its core aim was, and is, to ensure that 'UNHCR has an effective independent oversight system giving confidence to UNHCR's stakeholders over UNHCR's efficiency, economy and effectiveness'. All of the IGO's actions during my tenure have been in support of this single objective. I believe in the power of good independent oversight, whether for assurance or in handling integrity matters. I believe it

to be disproportionately impactful on organisations, precisely because of its independence, objectivity, and organisational position. This disproportionate impact is especially so for those organisations, such as UNHCR, that are complex; have objectives and mandates that are not easily measured and delivered by the profit motive alone; and for whom the path to success is complex and challenging.

It has always been my aim as Inspector General to do things differently, making independent oversight, both for assurance and integrity matters, greater than the sum of its individual parts. The IGO's independence is not a tool to be brandished, but a differentiator to be understood, cherished and utilised to good effect for the organisation. As UNHCR's first externally appointed, and independent, inspector general, setting the organisational tone and getting the balance of independence with responsibility has been important.

Independent oversight is, perhaps perversely, dependent; dependent on counterpart governance and management teams; it is not an island. I have been grateful to the many member state missions that have reached out and engaged with my office's work. I have also been very happy to work with the current High Commissioner, who has been understanding, supportive and straightforward on the challenges we have tackled together during my tenure. He has set the right tone for his senior leadership team, and for that I am grateful. I also thank the Deputy High Commissioner for her continued focus on the prevention of, and accountability for, sexual misconduct. This has empowered me in my role to make real progress in this area.

Effective oversight should enhance the supportive 'glue' of trust, allowing both good governance and strong management to flourish in their appropriate spheres. Both parties should want, and be able to, utilise the Inspector General and his office for independent and objective counsel, support, general advice, and yes, sometimes challenge and disagreement. I hope I have managed all of these roles well during my tenure.

As independent oversight overall is not an island, neither are its constituent parts. This applies equally to the ecosystem of assurance, whether from the Board of Auditors, Joint Inspection

Unit, the OIOS-provided internal audit service, the Evaluation Office or donor and other external assurance providers. I have worked hard to support and enable good collaboration and coworking amongst the assurance providers and good, fruitful collaboration with second line management oversight teams, for example, Enterprise Risk Management colleagues.

For integrity issues, the same systems approach applies, with collaborative working to solve integrity challenges, whilst respecting individual mandates and confidentiality. I believe in confidentiality, not secrecy. This approach enables information sharing on a need-to-know basis, for the benefit of good justice, lessons learned, and accountability systems and overall efficiency and effectiveness to achieve optimal outcomes.

For me, a hallmark of good independent oversight is the required application of systems thinking, and the encouragement of the various independent entities for assurance and integrity to work collectively; applying independently their specialist, professional, skills and talents to best effect, in partnership with both UNHCR's management team and governance structures.

### Current position

*Distinguished delegates*, I want to turn to the momentous changes that have impacted UNHCR, and indeed the whole international humanitarian system, this year. You will be aware of the significant impact on UNHCR and its staffing, my Office and the oversight system as a whole, has not been unaffected. I have set out in my report some of the specific impacts on my Office and team. Whilst my Office has always had an ongoing efficiency programme during my tenure, including the advanced developments in the use of artificial intelligence I outlined in my report; *and* I anticipated the potential for impact early in 2025, this was not enough. Like the rest of UNHCR and the system more generally, our capacity has been reduced, and we have lost highly skilled oversight and investigations staff. These are not easily replaced.

I have taken steps to ensure, however, that the oversight system remains effective and credible. For assurance, my Strategic Oversight Team has worked to ensure that all oversight providers

regularly exchange views on changed and increased risks, and that adjustments and refocusing of their work for 2025 and into 2026, has followed.

It is hard to understate how challenging such a scale of change is for any organisation, least of all when the surrounding eco-system around that organisation is so changed too. My concern during 2025 has been to ensure that the control framework remains credible and intact, and that UNHCR's management team takes steady and systematic steps to restitute and reconstitute itself into a leaner, fitter and more effective form, as a smaller, prioritised UNHCR.

### Assurance

For assurance, my Office, in addition to coordinating amongst the various assurance providers, has delivered assurance directly, in the form of risk-based advisory work complementing the more formal assurance products of the oversight entities. This has been through my Strategic Oversight Team, a concept devised by my predecessor, but now actualised under me.

This small team of high-quality assurance professionals has delivered agile, risk-based, substantive risk analysis, consultancy advice and assurance, during the quick-paced restructuring UNHCR undertook in quarter one of this year. Now, post that first phase of change, my Office has an agile assurance plan, utilising a number of modalities, ranging in formality, to provide flexible and meaningful assurance, by tracking the various change initiatives and changed risk landscape wrought by UNHCR's restructuring.

### Investigations

For my Office's part, on integrity matters, the IGO has been forced to focus its efforts on the most important priorities: fraud, sexual misconduct and proactive fraud detection work. We have also utilised the already garnered efficiency savings to, at least partially, offset the cuts so far this year.

We saw a reduction in overall complaints numbers in the first half of this calendar year, for the

first time since the onset of the COVID pandemic, where a similar phenomenon emerged. As before, numbers of complaints have since recovered, though we are predicting a 12% decline in overall complaints in the calendar year 2025, compared to 2024. In terms of the mix of complaints, fraud, and workplace related complaints are now the two largest categories, reflecting the changing risk profile of UNHCR. Upwards trends in fraud and sexual exploitation and abuse complaints continue, both possibly as a result of capturing more events through enhanced communications concerning reporting; and increasing trust in UNHCR's systems. We continue to see, however, 'cold spots' in reporting in certain regions and country operations, and I have continued to make the case for the full application of the mandated reporting of misconduct to my Office, as evidenced by our campaign video today.

### Conclusion

*Distinguished Delegates*, I conclude not only my remarks to this forum, but as I come towards the end of my tenure as UNHCR's Inspector General, with the observation that 'trust arrives on foot and leaves on horseback'. Independent oversight is not, in my view, a symptom of a lack of trust, but an integral and special part of maintaining that trust. As UNHCR faces continued significant turbulence this year and into next, I ask you to continue to engage with, protect and utilise, the IGO to its best effect, as a bridge between governance and management, and as a tool to ensure the highest standards of performance and integrity are maintained.

I thank my excellent team for all of their work; and you all for your support, over these last years.