

UNHCR 77th Executive Committee

Statement by Henri van den Idsert

Evaluation Office

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Thank you, Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, High Commissioner,

- **It is an honor** to present this statement on behalf of my team, and in my capacity as Acting Head of the Evaluation Office.
- **Now, consider for a moment** the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The current Ebola outbreak is not only the largest in its history, but it also disproportionately threatens displaced populations. How do you continue to serve and protect a forcibly displaced population of 7 million people, when you have to cut 50 per cent of your workforce and close down six field offices?
- **Addressing a dilemma** of this proportion requires more than intuition - it requires objective evidence. Evidence that allows you to prioritize and sequence your interventions so that they reach the most vulnerable and firmly anchor your strategy into existing national systems.
- **The Country Strategy Evaluation** commissioned in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is but one example of how evaluation can support operations to refine strategies in their hardest moments.
- **Within the current financial context**, we must keep asking ourselves one critical question: "Are we making the right choices, and are we adapting to best serve those most in need?"
- **The Evaluation Office exists** in service to this question. Our ultimate value is to generate a cumulative body of independent evidence that facilitates learning, demands accountability, and helps this organization navigate complex transitions.
- **For that evidence to have an impact**, it must reach decision-makers at the right time. This is why evaluation must have a seat at the table when

strategies are being defined. Because those strategies ultimately affect the lives of millions who seek protection, assistance, and solutions.

Distinguished Delegates,

- **Allow me to briefly** touch on our performance over the last year, before looking ahead to the future.
- **During this reporting period**, UNHCR completed 20 independent evaluations: eight centralized evaluations covering important thematic areas such as climate action and UNHCR's readiness to manage tightly earmarked funds. We also completed **12 decentralized evaluations** covering multiple projects across five regions.
- **At the inter-agency level**, we collaborated on a synthesis of evaluative evidence for the response in Ukraine, contributed financially to the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation in Sudan, and sat on the management group for the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations in The Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the earthquake response in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic.
- **An important highlight** of this period was the work we did to inform the forthcoming Strategic Directions. Using AI, we synthesized a decade of evaluative evidence and produced 12 thematic papers that are now available to the public.
- **This critical work** identifies good practices and recurring challenges across key thematic areas, including but not limited to advocacy, coordination, self-reliance, and emergency response. **Importantly**, this synthesis will ensure that UNHCR's institutional memory is not lost during periods of high staff turnover, reform, and leadership transition.

Excellencies,

- **While we take a lot of pride** in these achievements, the reality is that we are operating under acute resource constraints along with the rest of the agency.
- **UNHCR allocates an average** of 0.14 per cent of its global annual expenditure on evaluation—this is roughly half the investment of other

comparable UN agencies, and about one quarter of the minimum benchmark recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit.

- **With an excellent but small team** of seven staff and four affiliate consultants, we continue to deliver on our centralized workplan and provide quality assurance and technical assistance to all decentralized and all donor-mandated evaluations.
- **External, independent assessments** of our work show that the quality of our evaluations remain stable and robust, with an average quality rating of 67 per cent, in comparison to 65 per cent the year before.
- **In the last year**, we also made progress in supporting the Executive Office to establish a baseline and formal system for tracking evaluation management responses.
- **We continue to coordinate** closely with audit and other oversight bodies in order to find synergies and reduce the burden on operations and field-based colleagues.
- **At the inter-agency level**, we are finally advancing how we measure longer-term outcomes. Together with WFP, we recently launched a joint impact evaluation funding window on safe returns and sustainable reintegration. This is an important step towards assessing the value-for-money of investments driving the High Commissioner's 50 by 35 vision.

Distinguished Delegates,

- **As we enter the final year of our current Evaluation Policy and strategy**, the next year will be a critical opportunity to re-think not only how evaluation is funded, but also how it is delivered and used.
- **To maximize our future impact**, the evaluation function must become more agile, efficient, and timely. We are already moving in this direction by embedding our affiliate workforce directly into evaluation teams. At the same time, we are exploring the use of an AI-assisted Evaluation Quality Assurance tool developed by UNDP.

- **These shifts will accelerate** processes related to data access and data analysis. They will also leverage existing institutional knowledge and ultimately drive down both the cost and duration of evaluations.
- **Beyond operational efficiencies**, we must also address the expanding footprint of decentralized evaluations, driven largely by tightly earmarked project funding. We have seen the proportion of country offices engaging in evaluation more than double—from 27 per cent in 2022 to 56 per cent in 2025.
- **To sustainably meet this growing demand**, we are working closely with senior management to establish a more predictable financing framework for decentralized evaluations, and we look forward to updating Member States on our progress soon.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

- **The Evaluation Office remains** committed to strengthening evidence, accountability, and learning alongside our partners. I welcome your continued collaboration as we work together to maximize the impact of our collective efforts.

Thank you.