



Statement by

Nathalie Meynet

Chairperson, Global Staff Council
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Distinguished Chair,
High Commissioner,
Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,

Last year, the Global Staff Council spoke to this Committee about the devastating consequences of the financial crisis for our workforce and for the people we serve. Today, at the first Executive Committee under the leadership of our new High Commissioner there is one thing that remain unchanged: **the remarkable commitment of UNHCR colleagues**. Despite the numerous reductions in personnel and resources, they continue to do their utmost to protect refugees and help them find lasting solutions.

UNHCR has long represented the United Nations at its best: an organization whose people are present where they are needed most, often at considerable personal risk, and whose commitment to those forced to flee extends far beyond the immediate emergency.

Since the realignment in 2024 and the financial crisis that followed in 2025, UNHCR has undergone successive rounds of restructuring and **its workforce shrank by more than 8,000 people**. This year, the Reduction in Force exercise (SPRIF) has led to the separation of close to another 1,000 international colleagues. Further reductions are expected as the organization reshapes its structures and operational footprint for 2027.

All this combined has created a perfect storm for the organization. Many of the colleagues separated, national and international, have devoted decades of their lives to our mandate. They helped build the expertise, relationships and institutional knowledge on which UNHCR still depends. Their contribution deserves our deepest gratitude.

Those who remain have lived through successive reductions, growing workloads and prolonged uncertainty. Many of them now carry responsibilities once shared by much larger teams.



However, their sense of purpose is reflected in every function: the drivers who enable teams to reach remote communities; the registration and protection colleagues who help families access asylum and secure their rights; and the supply, administrative, finance and technical teams who keep operations running. Others work with governments to strengthen asylum systems, create opportunities for self-reliance and support safe and voluntary return when conditions allow.

Even with fewer resources, those colleagues draw on their judgment, experience and relationships to find ways to continue delivering. But their dedication cannot compensate indefinitely for lost operational capacity, and we cannot run the risk to lose more of this unique expertise built over decades, that simply cannot be recreated when funding becomes available again.

Retaining that capacity and nurturing the future workforce requires a clear workforce strategy, based on the skills our operations need, making full use of the expertise still available within the organization, and creating opportunities to redeploy or bring back experienced colleagues.

As we look forward, we must also learn from how we reached this point. Accountability, including at senior management level, and effective oversight will be essential if the lessons of these years are to guide the future decisions.

We are glad that through the ongoing dialogue of the Staff Council with the High Commissioner, and particularly the consultation regarding the future contractual framework, that a minimum of predictability is preserved for the core staff of the organization with the five-year contracts.

Distinguished chair and delegates,

As Member States consider the future of their support to UNHCR, we respectfully recall that responsibility for protecting refugees ultimately extends beyond funding an organization. It includes safeguarding the asylum system itself and ensuring that those seeking protection can access it in practice.

The current trajectory of reduced funding, increased earmarking and growing restrictions on protection space is weakening more than UNHCR's operational capacity. It is hampering the international protection regime at the moment it is needed most. The immediate consequences are felt by refugees and displaced people who lose access to protection, assistance and solutions.

It also means that due to tightly earmarked funding, UNHCR is forced to reduce its presence in operations where protection needs remain urgent because funding cannot be directed where it is most needed.



If those who have already lost their homes, livelihoods and communities are left without meaningful protection, we should recognize this for what it is: not simply a budgetary challenge, but a failure of collective responsibility.

The true measure of our commitment to human rights is not found in our declarations, but in whether the most vulnerable can still rely on the protection and the promises from the 1951 convention. The commitments made in this room must mean something to the people whose safety, rights and future depend on them.

And let us remember that UNHCR is fundamentally a field-based protection agency. We welcome the new High Commissioner's ambition for the future of the organization and his determination to prioritize the field. But giving operations a greater share of a shrinking budget cannot, by itself, restore their ability to protect. **The needs of refugees have not diminished simply because our resources have.** Nor should staff be viewed as overhead costs to be reduced. In a field-based agency, colleagues are central to the delivery of protection, whether working directly with refugees or making that work possible.

The Staff Council stands ready to work constructively with the High-Commissioner and senior management to shape the future of UNHCR. We bring the experience and perspectives of colleagues across the organization, and remain determined to ensure that their voices are heard, their expertise valued, and their rights respected in the decisions ahead.

We fully recognize the financial pressures facing governments and our shared responsibility to use every contribution effectively. But what began as a response to a financial crisis must not lead to the permanent weakening of UNHCR's capacity to protect refugees.

You have asked UNHCR to reform, to become leaner, more efficient and more accountable. The organization has responded at an enormous human and institutional cost. Our colleagues have carried much of that burden, and continue to do so. It is now your turn, as Member States, to fulfill your part of this responsibility: to provide sufficient and predictable funding, with a much greater share of unearmarked contributions, and to uphold the principles of refugee protection that you have entrusted UNHCR to defend.

After years of uncertainty, our colleagues deserve more than recognition for their resilience. They deserve to look ahead with hope, knowing that their experience and commitment will remain at the heart of UNHCR's future.

May this new chapter give them the opportunity to continue the work to which so many have devoted their lives. **Above all, may it ensure that UNHCR remains strong enough to stand by refugees, defend their rights and provide the protection they need, wherever they are forced to flee.**

Thank you.