

DRAFT REPORT OF THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING
OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

(23 - 24 September 2004)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Jean-Marc Boulgaris (Switzerland). He noted that the third annual Standing Committee meeting was being held earlier than in previous years, so as to allow additional time before the plenary session of the Executive Committee for delegations to consider documentation and to hold informal consultations on the preparation of the different conclusions and decisions.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE THIRTY-FIRST MEETING

2. The agenda for the meeting (EC/54/SC/CRP.15) was adopted.

III. ADOPTION OF THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE THIRTIETH MEETING

3. The draft report of the Standing Committee's thirtieth meeting held from 29 June to 1 July 2004, contained in document EC/54/SC/CRP.16, was adopted, with changes to the French version as indicated by the Secretariat.

IV. PROGRAMMES, BUDGETS AND FUNDING

4. The Deputy High Commissioner provided a general introduction to the item. She outlined several aspects of the proposed 2005 budget relating to the High Commissioner's vision for adapting and reshaping UNHCR's role in providing protection and in seeking and implementing durable solutions, notably through multilateral fora such as Convention Plus. In this context, she also highlighted the importance of resettlement. This vision included recognition of the critical role of partners and the conviction that UNHCR should play a vital part in providing expertise to define total refugee needs and in galvanizing all sources of aid to meet needs collectively. This would require global presence and strengthened senior management attention to advocate for legal and physical protection, the implications of which were reflected in the budget, including in the proposal to create an additional Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) post. The budget also covered the proposed allocation of further human and systems resources to other key areas of global priority for the Office. Particular focus in 2005 was being paid to implementing and providing the means to render sustainable a number of voluntary repatriation operations in Africa.

5. The Deputy High Commissioner underlined that UNHCR's proposed budget for 2005 represented stability, with no real growth from the previous year, and confirmed that efforts were being pursued to lower the support factor in the programme-support costs ratio. Further moves to rationalize, streamline and simplify key organizational policies, procedures, structures and response mechanisms were being explored through a current headquarters process review.

A. Update on programmes, budgets and funding in 2004

6. The Controller briefly introduced the first sub-item on updated information on the financial situation in 2004 as contained in document EC/54/SC/CRP.17 (and Corr.1), confirming that the funding situation for the annual programme budget for 2004 was stable, allowing for the issuance of the fourth quarter obligations plan without reductions. He drew attention to progress achieved in financial performance reporting through the inclusion of actual levels of expenditure in column 4 of Annex 1 of the update.

7. The Director of the Division of External Relations (DER) commented that the approved 2004 Annual Programme Budget of US\$ 954.9 was already a significantly higher budget than in previous years, and with the addition of the supplementary budgets approved to date, amounted to US\$ 1.2 billion: the highest budget figure since 1996. He expressed UNHCR's appreciation for the support received to date amounting to some \$837 million, and in particular for contributions that were early and predictable, as well as to those donors who had maintained the level in local currencies. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative was also a welcome factor in this respect. The Director pointed to areas of the budget which still required additional funding. These included \$70 million under the annual programme, as well as a number of urgent requirements for current supplementary programmes in Burundi, eastern Chad/Darfur, Southern Sudan, Liberia and Iraq. The Director drew attention to efforts being made to bridge the gap between the required budget and projected income for UNHCR's proposed activities, amongst which he highlighted the steady increase in private sector fundraising, with a projected income of \$22 million in 2004, as well as signs of progress towards stronger partnerships with traditional and new donors on the 30 per cent base-level model of contributions.

8. While expressing satisfaction with the relatively positive funding situation and UNHCR's management of the budget for 2004, several delegations recalled that the coverage of budget needs did not correspond to the total real needs of refugees, and reiterated calls for progress towards needs-based budgeting in parallel, some argued, with resource-based planning. The inclusion of reporting on actual expenditure in the update was welcomed, but one delegation queried the apparent differences in rates of expenditure.

9. The Deputy High Commissioner said that the 2004 budget had been drawn up with a sense of awareness of the need to be realistic in relation to anticipated funding. The question of how to capture total needs was a high priority and the High Commissioner was developing a strategy through the headquarters process review under which UNHCR representatives in the field would in future be tasked with both providing the expertise to define total needs of refugees in their respective countries and leading efforts to galvanize all partners in the country to expand their own projects to help address these needs.

B. Operational Reserve Category II: observations on the pilot project

10. The Director of DER commented briefly on the initial results of the pilot Operational Reserve Category II project (document EC/54/SC/CRP.18), emphasizing that the annual budget had not suffered from the creation of Category II. Nevertheless, in order to be able to make a more informed decision on whether or not to propose the continuation of this funding mechanism, he requested that the Committee consider extending the pilot phase to allow time to observe the experiment for a full year, and to discuss the question again at the 32nd Standing Committee in March 2005.

11. While there was general agreement to extend the period of the pilot project on the use of the Operational Reserve Category II, most interventions called for UNHCR to arrange for an independent evaluation of the experience and, in particular, of the criteria or guidelines on the operation of Category II. Other delegations questioned the need for Category II, or expressed a preference for a single, consolidated Operational Reserve. In relation to Category I, one delegation queried the apparent lack of reference to a transfer of \$10 million for Chad. Another delegation enquired as to why his country was not shown in Annex VI as hosting refugees.

C. Annual Programme Budget for 2005

12. The Chairman proposed moving directly to hear delegations' interventions on this sub-item in view of the fact that the Deputy High Commissioner had already introduced the proposed UNHCR Annual Programme Budget for 2005 (A/AC.96/992); the addendum containing a proposal to establish an Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) post in UNHCR (A/AC.96/992/Add.1); and the addendum containing the Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) on the proposed Budget (A/AC.96/992/Add. 2). Corrigenda to the budget document had also been distributed (A/AC.96/992/Corr.1 and Corr.2).

13. There was general support for the proposed 2005 budget, but a number of delegations recommended controlling support costs, and one queried the basis for the proposed 75-25 ratio for programme and support costs. There were several calls for continued reinforcement of protection delivery and monitoring capacities, in particular for a clearer indication of the provision being made for resettlement and gender mainstreaming. Other delegations queried the distribution of posts, notably grade levels, and the breakdown of protection posts. The ongoing challenge of staff-in-between-assignments drew comment from several delegations. In relation to the proposed accomplishments and indicators of achievement, it was felt that these, in some instances, could be more strategic and precise. A number of delegations also expressed reservations about the statistics showing the number of proposed beneficiaries as at the end of 2005 (Table II.2).

14. One delegation expressed grave concern over the static figure provided for one refugee group over the years, and insisted on the need for UNHCR to carry out a registration exercise for the refugee population concerned, failing which the member State concerned would not find it possible to support the annual budget for 2005.

15. Responding to observations made by delegations on the proposed new Assistant High Commissioner (Protection) post, which would be given further consideration under the agenda sub-item on the JIU Report, the Deputy High Commissioner gave further explanations as to how the post would strengthen the Office's capacity to carry out its mandate. She also described the work and coordination activities that would be undertaken by the new Senior Ethics Officer, who would be working in tandem with the incoming Special Adviser on Gender Issues.

16. The Deputy High Commissioner stressed that the ratio of support versus operational costs should not be misconstrued as being purely headquarters versus field costs. She gave examples of increased support costs at Headquarters, including the mainstreaming of Medical Service and Payroll Operations positions; the establishment of the new Chief Information Officer position; and the creation of new resettlement posts. In closing, she acknowledged that the Office's use of standards and indicators required improvement.

17. The Controller drew attention to a handout on post creations and discontinuations (made available at the back of the room) which showed that the headquarters portion of total posts had remained stable at 16 per cent. In response to queries about the overall number of persons of concern falling, he explained that while the total activity level of the 2005 annual programme budget would decrease slightly compared to 2004, there was a nominal increase due to currency rates and inflation. He reiterated that UNHCR was trying to reduce the support costs to 25 per cent in 2005 from the current 27-28 per cent mark.

V. MANAGEMENT, FINANCE, OVERSIGHT AND HUMAN RESOURCES

A. Finance

18. The Controller opened the item by presenting document A/AC.96/990: Voluntary Funds Administered by the United Nations High Commissioner: Accounts for the year 2003. He drew attention to UNHCR's analysis and comments on the financial highlights of the year which were to be found in Chapter 1 of the Report of the Board of Auditors. The Controller described different aspects of the proactive fiscal management, including the development of a new means of assessing currency rate fluctuations.. The result had been that total income exceeded expenditure in 2003 for the first time in five years. UNHCR was committed to continuing efforts to strengthen financial control on implementing partner projects, as recommended by the Board of Auditors, and the Controller anticipated further progress in this respect with the introduction of the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP).

B. Oversight

19. Under sub-item 4 B (i) and (ii) on oversight, the Controller drew attention to the updated matrix on the follow-up to the 2002 Audit Report available in the room. This showed that the percentage of implementation stood at almost 63 per cent at that point, and it was anticipated that this would rise to 80 per cent by the end of 2004, following the completion of measures in response to another six recommendations.

20. With regard to the Report of the Board of Auditors on UNHCR's accounts for 2003 (A/AC.96/991) and its annex outlining measures taken or proposed in response to the recommendations of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/991/Add.1), the Controller noted that the main recommendations concerned Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based on the 2003 horizontal external audit; refugee statistics and registration (Project Profile); and the decentralization/recentralization of the Africa Bureau. The 2003 accounts had been given an unqualified opinion by the Board of Auditors, and the Controller drew attention to some of the areas in which corrective action to address the Board's recommendations had already begun, notably on accounting procedures.

21. In their interventions, several delegations acknowledged progress achieved in improving the Office's financial management, notably in more regular reporting to the Standing Committee and in increasing, by almost 20 per cent, the level of timely financial reporting of implementing partners. Nevertheless, it was felt that further evidence of commitment to improve was required. Specific areas highlighted by delegations included the tracking of assets; managing forward obligations and liabilities; accrediting implementing partners and obtaining monitoring reports; improving the accuracy of statistics for persons of concern; and managing the risk of corruption and fraud. There was also concern about the lack of progress on the recommendations concerning registration, as well as the slowness of follow-up on security management.

22. In his response, the Controller drew attention to the current potential for improving asset management aided by the gradual installation of MSRP and the strengthening of the review board. He took note of the recommendations concerning the registration systems and acknowledged that these were essential as a sound basis for population management. On implementing partner reporting, UNHCR was working to find better solutions, but this involved investment in capacity building for local NGOs. Mechanisms for strengthening the assessment and management of risk were being developed. The Deputy High Commissioner confirmed that the Oversight committee had been strengthened and that risk management was currently being reviewed by the internal auditors. She informed the Committee that the new Inspector General had now taken up his functions.

23. The Report on Internal Audit (A/AC.96/995) was presented by the Officer-in-Charge of the UNHCR Audit Service of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services. She underlined the encouraging upward direction of the overall assessment of UNHCR's audit control under which 86 per cent of the audited areas had been assessed as average or above average. In other areas where prompt corrective action was required, UNHCR had been timely in responding and taking the required action to implement the audit recommendations. The Officer-in-Charge commented that in recent years the internal audit function had become more proactive, leading to the deployment of audit teams to cover ongoing large operations, thus enabling in-depth audit coverage and "hands-on" advice to staff. She also commended the positive working relationship with staff and counterparts in other oversight functions in the Office, as well as with the United Nations Board of Auditors and the Joint Inspection Unit.

24. In response to one delegation's query concerning the rationale for auditors to be deployed to emergency situations, both the Audit Service's Officer-in-Charge and the Controller emphasized the usefulness of having an auditor present on the spot.

25. Under sub-item 4.B (iii), the Chairman welcomed UNHCR's new Chief Information Officer and Director of the Division of Information Systems and Technology (DIST), who presented UNHCR's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) strategy (EC/54/SC/CRP.19). The Director outlined the key elements of the ICT plan for 2005, and highlighted the activities and focus of the work for this planning period.

26. The Director said the new division had been created to manage and coordinate the information technology-related activities of UNHCR more effectively. One significant consequence would be the ability to develop a long-term, single Information Technology (IT) strategy which would optimize and improve the use of technology resources across UNHCR. This process would be concluded at the end of 2004 and would produce recommendations to ensure effective alignment of priorities, a world-class ICT service-delivery capacity and effective ICT cost management.

27. The Director advised that the Management System Renewal Project (MSRP), based on Peoplesoft software, had been successfully installed at headquarters and in UNHCR's regional office in Brussels, and was poised to be "rolled out" to field locations, beginning with some pilot sites at the end of 2004. All day-to-day operational activities had been transferred to UNHCR's outsource partner, CORIO, which was located in the United States. This system, established in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme, was a good example of inter-agency cooperation, leading to cost savings, increased productivity and the elimination of redundancy.

28. Work had also begun on planning for the deployment of the human resource management and payroll components of Peoplesoft at headquarters. Other priorities included upgrading technical infrastructure in field offices, improving the emergency response capability, including disaster recovery at headquarters, and implementing the software to support the registration of refugees under Project Profile.

29. Delegations welcomed the measures already under way in UNHCR and asked for further information about the timeframes for implementation of other ICT measures, including recommendations made by the JIU, ACABQ and the Board of Auditors. One delegation asked whether funding for the measures had been included in the 2005 Budget or whether donors would be asked to contribute further. It would also be useful to have a progress report on the "roll-out" of the new registration system before the end of 2004.

30. Delegations welcomed the creation of a new division, though one commented that it would be important for that division to remain grounded in its primary purpose which was to serve the needs of the organization as a whole. It would also be important to continue to monitor progress and to link resource allocation with strategic goals and indicators. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) had recently done some interesting work in this area.

C. Human Resources

31. Introducing the item on human resources issues, the Deputy High Commissioner acknowledged a much more systematic approach to reform was needed. The High Commissioner's headquarters process review was taking a bold approach to reforming UNHCR's workforce management and would go beyond "fixes" to valuing competency and

good conduct. Particular attention would be paid to recruitment to ensure a high quality intake; exit strategies to ensure career flow; an awards programme to reward effective performance; as well as a strengthening of sanctions for misconduct. Clarity in terms of career development opportunities was key to reducing uncertainty among staff members and to building competencies through practical experience and training. The human resources strategy would also value transparency in order to build confidence and reinforce accountability.

32. The Director of the Division of Human Resources Management said a number of reforms had been initiated by the High Commissioner, in a manner consistent with the external auditors' recommendations of 2002 and following consultations involving Senior Management and the Staff Council. These aimed to encourage mobility; reward effective performance; sanction misconduct; optimize efficiencies; enhance transparency; recognize service in hardship duty stations; respect the balance between work and family obligations; enhance geographical diversity and achieve gender equity.

33. The Director outlined the changes introduced in the previous 18 months, which included tightening controls over the number of staff funded from temporary assistance; implementation of a new contracts policy; revision of the rotation policy; improvement in the management of staff-in-between-assignments; review of allowances to offer appropriate recognition to staff serving in hardship duty stations; dissemination of UNHCR's Code of Conduct and the Guidelines for Managers; assumption of responsibility for the global payroll function and for the medical service; the introduction of the International Professional Roster during the first half of 2004; the abolition of the rank-in-post policy; and the modernization of the information systems used daily for human resources management and payroll purposes under the MSRP. The Director noted that in its 2003 report, the Board of Auditors had acknowledged that progress was being achieved in policy development and implementation and signalled the continuing need for monitoring. The JIU had reached similar conclusions in its 2003 report on UNHCR.

34. Several delegations appreciated the reforms already initiated, but indicated there was a need for "continued vigilance" to achieve the desired results. Delegations continued to be concerned by the shortage of experienced staff, especially protection staff, in the field. This was particularly so in emergencies such as that in Chad, which also went to the issue of emergency response. The reduction in the number of staff-in-between-assignments was welcomed, though some delegations indicated they wished to know more about the length of time some staff were in this situation as well as about UNHCR's long-term strategies with regard to such staff. One delegation encouraged greater mobility between organizations and agencies, while another emphasized the need to seek other methods for rewarding high performance.

35. One delegation suggested that UNHCR should recruit and promote on merit rather than under the "existing patronage system". A performance review system of integrity was critical to UNHCR. In this context, appreciation was expressed for the external advertisement of the post of Director of the Division of Human Resources Management. Delegations also welcomed the establishment of the new post for refugee women and refugee children, and wished to know when it would be filled.

36. One delegation expressed appreciation for the reissue of the Code of Conduct with the Secretary-General's Bulletin on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and wished to receive an update on the sexual and gender-based violence case in Nepal.
37. Another delegation wished to have more information about UNHCR's taking over the global payroll and medical service.
38. In responding to comments from delegations, the Director of the Division of Human Resources Management agreed UNHCR had to review how it deployed staff other than "stop gap" emergency teams, and should consider replacing existing staff with others more qualified for the emergency, if necessary. With regard to staff-in-between-assignments, the Director noted that the majority were in this position for no more than a matter of months, but appreciated that this was nevertheless not satisfactory for the staff concerned and that UNHCR had to address the issue much more systematically.
39. Addressing the concern to have a promotion system based on merit and a performance review system of integrity, the Director emphasized that these issues were addressed in the Appointments, Postings and Promotions Board guidelines introduced in November 2003. One problem with rewarding performance with promotion, however, was that while the rank-in-post policy had been abolished, it would take some time before a significant number of positions became available for those who merited them.
40. The Director was pleased to report that some 50 UNHCR staff members were on secondment or loan to other agencies or organizations, but acknowledged UNHCR was not equally good at accepting individuals in return; here there was some room for improvement.
41. With regard to the allegations of SGBV in Nepal, the Director reported that the High Commissioner on 2 September had issued a message to all staff to advise that there had been no wrongdoing on the part of UNHCR staff and that the cases against three staff members had been closed.
42. The Director gave some background to UNHCR's taking over of the payroll, which had been a decision by UNOG rather than UNHCR, and was linked to the introduction of the MSRP. The management of the Medical Service had been taken over to enhance support to field staff, but it would continue to coordinate and cooperate with the Joint Medical Service in New York.
43. The Deputy High Commissioner also outlined UNHCR's commitment to increase protection posts to support UNHCR's "unique mission". She affirmed UNHCR's desire to recognize merit, ultimately to serve refugees better, and to improve its emergency response capability.

D. Management

44. The Deputy High Commissioner introduced the report of the JIU entitled Review of Management and Administration in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (EC/54/SC/CRP.21). She applauded Inspector Sumihiro Kuyama and his team for the work that had gone into the report which was transmitted to UNHCR on 6 August 2004 and subsequently shared with ExCom members and Standing Committee observers. She advised that

the recommendations would be addressed in proposals for consideration by the Executive Committee during the 2005 cycle of meetings and that a comprehensive discussion of the reports would be completed by the 56th plenary session of the Executive Committee. UNHCR's formal response to the recommendations would be submitted within the three-month period stipulated in the JIU Statute.

45. The Deputy High Commissioner made a few comments in relation to three key recommendations of the report. With regard to Recommendation 1 to establish a post of Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR proposed rather to create a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection to focus on advocacy with States on protection and durable solutions. The High Commissioner had strong reservations about creating a second Deputy High Commissioner as it could create management ambiguity, confuse executive accountability and create institutional imbalance. UNHCR had "benchmarked" such a structure against other United Nations entities and had been strongly recommended not to move in this direction.

46. Regarding Recommendation 3 that UNHCR move to a biennial budget, the Deputy High Commissioner considered this was an issue that warranted more comprehensive consideration, especially to ensure it did not negatively affect UNHCR's flexibility and ability to allocate resources efficiently.

47. Finally, with regard to Recommendation 10 on the appointment of an independent Inspector General, the Deputy High Commissioner advised that UNHCR continued to believe that long service in UNHCR and independence were not mutually exclusive and considered in-depth knowledge of the culture of the organization an important asset. UNHCR's recently appointed Inspector General had served UNHCR for over 25 years. He understood UNHCR and the United Nations system intimately, but also had the character traits that would maintain the objectivity and independence required.

48. At the Chairman's invitation, Inspector Kuyama of the JIU made some additional brief introductory remarks, including to emphasize that the JIU wished to contribute to the ongoing reform process in UNHCR and, due to the recent lifting of the time limit on the mandate of UNHCR, considered the time opportune for long-term strategies. It was with this in mind that the JIU had made its 15 recommendations, three of which were directed specifically at the Executive Committee.

49. Delegations were keen to have UNHCR's full response to the recommendations made by the JIU, although a number of delegations gave their preliminary views on the recommendations, focusing especially on the three recommendations directed at the Executive Committee. Several expressed reservations about revising the Statute to establish a second Deputy High Commissioner post, although others considered the proposal deserved further consideration. One delegation pointed out a new Deputy High Commissioner post would be charged against the United Nations Regular Budget, which was already failing to cover a fair share of UNHCR's administrative expenditures. A number of delegations supported the High Commissioner's proposal to establish an Assistant High Commissioner post, but most preferred to receive further information or to await the outcome of the headquarters review process before committing themselves to the establishment of any new high-level post. One delegation was interested to hear more about how the Deputy High Commissioner role related to the role of High Commissioner. Another delegation preferred to see

any change as cost-neutral and part of an overall package which included upgrading of the resettlement role.

50. On the JIU's recommendation to change to a biennial budget cycle, most delegations considered this warranted further consideration in the coming year, with a full analysis of the pros and cons, and consideration of whether a biennial cycle would contribute to securing full funding of the budget, including a greater share of the United Nations Regular Budget. There could be some advantages in moving to a biennial budget cycle, but care would need to be taken not to limit UNHCR's flexibility and to consider whether this might increase the number and duration of UNHCR's supplementary programmes. Several delegations advised that they would continue to fund UNHCR on an annual basis even if the organization moved to a biennial cycle. One delegation considered the High Commissioner's approach of combining an annual and biennial budget cycles wise and responsible.

51. Many delegations agreed with the JIU's recommendation on the independence of the Inspector General and considered the selection process for this post should be transparent and open. Equally, delegations acknowledged the need for any Inspector General to have an in-depth knowledge of the organization. A few delegations were surprised at the appointment of a new Inspector General so soon after the JIU Report was issued, but recognized the need to fill the position without delay. Several delegations agreed with the JIU's recommendation that at the request of the Inspector General any report should be submitted to the Executive Committee. Another delegation supported the JIU's call for clear guidelines on the respective roles of the Inspector General and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, especially where allegations involved senior staff.

52. One delegation believed that UNHCR needed to develop a professional cadre of investigation and inspection personnel and supported the JIU's recommendation to eliminate the rotation policy for at least some of these staff and to bring additional experts into UNHCR for this purpose. Another delegation considered such appointments should be time-limited.

53. Some delegations commented on other recommendations made by the JIU. One delegation questioned the utility of moving the programme planning and coordination functions to the Budget Section, while another one considered the functions should be brought together under the Division of Operational Support. That delegation also queried attempts to correlate refugee caseload with country office size and staffing and considered UNHCR should not just link its Country Operations Plans to UNDAFs and CCAs, but also, more importantly, with the Consolidated Appeals Process. One delegation expressed support for the recommendation that the High Commissioner should submit a long-term strategic framework for consideration by the Executive Committee.

54. One delegation invited UNHCR to implement the JIU's recommendation to ensure that there were no undue delays in the process of registration or re-registration of refugees. Another delegation thought that the JIU might be drawing conclusions from too narrow a base of host countries and emphasized the importance of considering registration as linked to the main protection mandate rather than simply a matter of assistance.

55. One delegation challenged the recommendation which asked the High Commissioner to highlight the potential contribution of refugees as "agents for development of the host country",

considering that even where host communities had benefited from the presence of refugees, it was not necessarily right to refer to them as “agents for development”. Another delegation considered UNHCR should seek to utilize existing resettlement opportunities as much as possible and should look to the lessons from previous attempts to expand resettlement to developing countries.

56. Several delegations supported the need for a comprehensive information communications technology strategy. Some strong concerns were voiced over the content of the UNHCR website, in response to which the Director for External Relations noted that errors were corrected as soon as possible. UNHCR put an array of information and sources of information on the website to assist decision-makers, including at the national level, to make refugee status determinations as part of its duty to supervise application of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Director was, however, prepared to discuss any particular issues relating to this information function with delegations. Some delegations expressed support for UNHCR’s approach, though one noted that some of the information provided on the website perhaps went beyond the mandate. The Director also advised that UNHCR would revive the French website in 2005, but did not have the resources to have websites in other United Nations languages. There were, however, local UNHCR websites in Spanish and Arabic.

VI. PROTECTION/PROGRAMME POLICY

57. The Head of the Emergency and Security Service (ESS), in the presence of the Assistant High Commissioner, introduced the Update on Staff Safety and Security Management (EC/54/SC/CRP.20). UNHCR was undertaking innovative measures to meet its obligations and responsibilities in ensuring effective staff safety. A comprehensive review had led to some 80 recommendations by a Steering Committee headed by the Assistant High Commissioner. These were currently being considered by the High Commissioner.

58. The Head of ESS considered the policy changes would enable UNHCR to: integrate security considerations fully into the normal functioning of operations, including through a restructuring of ESS; train staff in effective security management concepts; to emphasize levels of accountability; promote the conduct of operations from a risk management and risk mitigation perspective; and ensure UNHCR’s role within the wider scope of the United Nations’ global security management. UNHCR’s reforms were designed to complement the Secretary-General’s efforts to improve the global United Nations security management structure.

59. The reforms outlined by the Head of ESS would require additional resources, with significant initial requirements. Much of the anticipated restructuring would, however, draw upon current resources and the enhancement of a more regional capacity would ameliorate resource requirements over the mid to long-term. The single most cost-intensive effort would be in the field of telecommunications response capacity.

60. The Head of ESS said that UNHCR requested from the Executive Committee members’ endorsement and the means to make the policy changes happen. He also said UNHCR wished to reiterate the appeal to all States, particularly those States in which refugees and staff were placed in difficult and high-risk environments, for stronger safety and protection measures at the national level, with active participation from UNHCR.

61. Several delegations affirmed they placed the highest priority on staff safety, acknowledging the humanitarian community was operating in an ever less secure environment, and welcoming the initiatives adopted by UNHCR over the past several months. While expressing some disappointment that the Steering Committee's report was not available to assist in this discussion, delegations supported the broad emphasis outlined on stronger individual and managerial responsibility; improved security training at all levels; coordination with UNSECOORD and other partner agencies; and additional funds for training and risk minimization procedures.

62. There were nevertheless a number of questions from delegations, including how UNHCR's decentralized approach could be reconciled with the more unified security management structure expected from the Secretary-General, and what UNHCR was doing to implement the security recommendations of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Several delegations were concerned that the Internal Audit report had mentioned deficiencies in UNHCR's country security plans and one delegation wondered what immediate steps were being taken to ensure the safety of UNHCR personnel as well as the safety of UNHCR's partners. Several delegations wished to hear more about the upgrade of security measures at headquarters and the costs involved. In this regard, the delegation of the host State announced that a plan to increase headquarters security had been developed and that the costs would be borne by the host State.

63. Concern was expressed about UNHCR's intention to establish a security information system when UNSECOORD was doing likewise. Several delegations stressed the importance of partnerships and coordination, while acknowledging the need for a decentralized system which allowed for good decisions to be made at the field level. More information was also sought on the links between the proposed changes for staff security and refugee camp security and whether field security officers would still be able to address both issues. One delegation asked that the "gender aspect" should be taken into account in staff security issues and training. Several delegations asked for clarification on how much the security measures would cost and how they would be funded.

64. The role of host States in ensuring the security of humanitarian staff to meet the protection and assistance needs of refugees was emphasized by two delegations, with a call for States which had not yet done so to ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

65. The Head of ESS reassured delegations UNHCR would very much be working within the framework of United Nations coordination, but would nevertheless be trying to ensure effective support at the field level. In addition to the estimated funding needs presented in the Annual Programme Budget for 2005, further requirements were being quantified in relation to needs outlined in the Steering Committee report as well as measures for improvement of Headquarters security. Training was the first priority; however the training strategy was not yet finalized, and would require a multi-year effort with an additional \$1 million over three years. On the gender aspect, the Head of ESS said that the report submitted by the Assistant High Commissioner to the High Commissioner took into account the need to give additional information to women and the need for quality training on the basis of gender.

66. The Assistant High Commissioner thanked the host State for its efforts to enhance security at headquarters. He appreciated the impatience with which some delegations awaited the Steering Committee report, which would be shared with Executive Committee members as soon as it had

been approved. He also noted the need for prudence: the envisaged measures would be implemented, in the first instance, over a period of three years.

VII. COORDINATION

67. In his introduction to the Update on Coordination Issues (EC/54/SC/INF.1), the Director of DER highlighted some of the key points in the document. He stressed the continuing UNHCR commitment to such fora as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), and support for the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in bringing a new focus to the collaborative approach on internally displaced persons (IDPs). He added that UNHCR had participated in the last year in a number of inter-agency missions to important operations such as Darfur, Liberia, Haiti, Ecuador, and in the Northern Caucasus. Continuing with coordination and partnerships in the United Nations system, the Director spoke about UNHCR's activities during the past year within the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), especially the initiative that UNHCR had taken to co-chair a working group within UNDG to develop guidelines for United Nations Resident Coordinators and Country Teams in achieving durable solutions for various target groups.

68. The Director went on to explain some of the key bilateral cooperation activities undertaken by UNHCR in recent months, with special emphasis on the ongoing partnership with WFP. He also cited recent collaboration efforts with UN-Habitat, the International Labour Office (ILO), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), among several others.

69. The Director concluded his introduction with specific references to the agency's work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working closely with UNHCR, most frequently in field situations as operational and implementing partners. Special mention was made of the "Practical Guide to the Systematic use of Standards and Indicators in UNHCR Operations" and its potential as a tool for strengthening needs assessment into the overall planning process with operational partners.

70. The Chairman then introduced Ms. Kathleen Cravero, Deputy Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), who had been invited to the Standing Committee as a guest speaker to provide an overview of the activities of UNAIDS and its collaboration with UNHCR, most notably in view of the recent acceptance of UNHCR as the tenth co-sponsor of UNAIDS.

71. Ms. Cravero's presentation to the Committee focused on three key elements, first touching on the status of the AIDS epidemic, then the role of UNAIDS as an advocate and coordinating agency, and finally on the partnership between UNAIDS and UNHCR. On the latter point, she welcomed UNHCR as the tenth UNAIDS co-sponsor, and stressed that this was not a new partnership. UNHCR had provided leadership on AIDS for some time in refugee settings. The new phase of the partnership would not only serve to open up new possibilities to collaborate but also require commitment on the Office's part to fulfill the numerous responsibilities involved in being an AIDS co-sponsor, such as participating as a member of the Committee of Co-sponsoring organizations, and full involvement in the development of the 2006-2007 unified budget and work plan. UNHCR was also expected to lead the UNAIDS

family, and the United Nations system as a whole, in “better understanding and intensifying action on issues related to AIDS and refugee populations.”

72. A number of delegations took the floor to thank the Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS for her informative statement and commitment to collaboration with UNHCR. One delegation also acknowledged the close cooperation that had existed between UNAIDS and UNHCR prior to UNHCR becoming a co-sponsor. Another delegation stressed the need for UNHCR to incorporate UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB) recommendations into its own governance mechanisms.

73. Delegations welcomed the comprehensive nature of the document provided to the Standing Committee, though one delegation noted that there remained questions on UNHCR’s coordination at the field level. In addition, the need to collaborate better with operational and implementing partners was highlighted, with emphasis on the importance of transparency. Joint needs assessments and integrated planning were also issues raised with reference to UNHCR’s collaboration with its partners.

74. UNHCR’s strengthened collaboration with the IASC, ECHA, and DPKO were cited as positive examples of improved coordination within the United Nations system, as well as UNHCR’s support, through staff secondment, to the newly formed Internal Displacement Division (IDD) within OCHA, and support for the collaborative approach on IDPs. The continued need to work within the IASC and other United Nations system bodies regarding the integrated mission structures was also deemed highly important. One delegation mentioned the desirability of working closely with OCHA and the Humanitarian Coordinators on the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), including needs assessments. The need was stressed to continue to work with the Red Cross Movement, including ICRC, in particular on issues related to the identification of solutions for former combatants. One United Nations agency (UN-Habitat) also took the floor and drew the attention of the Standing Committee to the increased collaboration between UNHCR and UN-Habitat as a result of the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies.

VIII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

75. The Chairman reminded the Committee of some practical arrangements for the forthcoming session of the Executive Committee from 4 to 8 October 2004, including the change in seating arrangements to coincide with arrangements for United Nations General Assembly and information on the special briefing session for ExCom members on the proceedings of the NGO 2003 pre-Excom session which would be held on Thursday, 30 September from 11.30 to 12.30 in Room XVII at the Palais des Nations.

76. The Deputy High Commissioner noted this had been the last substantive Standing Committee meeting which would be hosted by the Chairman and thanked him for his excellent chairmanship as well as his strong support for staff safety in his capacity as Ambassador of the host State.

77. There being no other business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed.

LIST OF POINTS
FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTION

- Seek solutions to ensure that members have sufficient time to consider the document on the annual accounts for the Voluntary Funds Administered by the United Nations High Commissioner prior to the annual September Standing Committee.
- Other follow-up points were incorporated into the draft decisions prepared for adoption by the Executive Committee at its fifty-fifth session.