

**59th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva, 4 March 2014**

**Introduction to Regional Activities and Global Programmes
Statement by Ms. Janet Lim,
UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you again for this session of the Standing Committee to jointly review UNHCR's regional operations.

By way of introduction to my colleagues' presentations on their specific regions, I would like to share with you some highlights and challenges which have characterized our operations globally, over the past year.

Mr. Chairman,

At this Standing Committee meeting last year, I opened stating that the previous year stood out as, and I quote, "the most challenging in terms of the number and magnitude of crises that we have had to respond to simultaneously, with unprecedented demands being made on the financial and human resources of the organisation." Unquote.

That statement, unfortunately, is now outdated. Last year I went through a long list – naming 23 countries where we had recently mounted major emergency operations. I will not put you through the same exercise again, but I will say – this list has now grown. The emergencies we have had this past year have been a continuation of some old ones with additional complexities and continuing increase in scale, such as Syria, as well as unexpected outbreaks of conflict-induced crisis, as in South Sudan and Central African Republic, and natural disaster in the Philippines. At its peak, UNHCR, as part of the international humanitarian system, was having to respond to four level 3 emergencies. The major conflict crises were also characterized by massive displacement of population inside the country and externally to neighboring countries, as well as a long, drawn-out emergency phase, with displacement continuing without an end in sight.

The management of these simultaneous and continuing emergencies has been most challenging in terms of financial and human resource mobilization. During 2013, we deployed additionally a total of 154 internal staff and 310 staff from standby partners to emergencies, while our appeals for Supplementary Budgets amounted to 1.4 billion dollars. It is a testimony to the hard work of our staff and partners that despite an exceptionally demanding year, the overall implementation rate in all our operations and no less in the emergencies, was maintained at some 96 percent of funds made available.

As emergencies become ever more demanding, we feel challenged to find more effective and efficient ways of doing business. Hence the Division of Programme Support and Management, DPSM, has intensified efforts to develop and improve on registration tools, such as biometrics, information management systems, assessment tools for better targeting, and policy and guidelines for the use of cash. While emergency response mechanisms of the organisation have been well tested, the Division of Emergency, Security, and Supply, DESS, is continuing to review their efficiency in light of continuing new demands, and is currently assessing the level and nature of functional areas that are critical in emergencies for which

predictable capacity will have to be ensured. The global emergency stockpile is also being recalibrated both in size and content to ensure maximum efficiency in its usage.

Throughout the continuously-intensifying emergencies, we have had to take a corporate approach to the response, meaning that every region and every part of the organisation was obliged to contribute to the capacities for the emergency operations. We have to acknowledge that this has been extremely taxing, and have recognized that we need more creative and flexible ways of recruiting and backstopping staff who have been called to emergencies. The challenges and burdens of responding to multiple, simultaneous emergencies have certainly been shared throughout the Organisation.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I have, in the past, highlighted the increasingly dangerous settings in which we work. This trend continues. One cannot overstate the courage which UNHCR colleagues and partners – especially our national colleagues - demonstrate as they put themselves daily in harm's way in order to help those most in need. In the Central African Republic and South Sudan, the work of our national staff has been complicated by the religious and ethnic nature of the conflicts, with the violence brought even closer to the personal level.

The direct targeting of humanitarian workers continues, as demonstrated by two recent serious security incidents with very close calls. In operations where we are obliged to work with integrated missions, it remains difficult to control misperceptions or questions about our neutrality and impartiality. Yet, in operations where there has been a complete breakdown of law and order, physical protection by the relevant authorities is needed before humanitarians can do their work. We will continue to be driven by the mantra of “Stay and Deliver”, but would require resources to mitigate risks to the maximum extent possible. It is indeed a reality that security has tremendously driven up the cost of delivery. Tomorrow afternoon there is a session dedicated to staff safety and security where more details will be shared.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

While emergencies continue to retain the attention-grabbing headlines, we are making conscious efforts to also prioritise durable solutions in protracted refugee situations.

While the Bureau Directors will certainly highlight important steps in relation to opportunities for solutions among refugees in their respective regions, I would like to focus on a new corporate approach to solutions.

In July of last year a Solutions Steering Group was established with representation from all concerned divisions and bureaus. The Group is mandated to take a fresh look at UNHCR's approach to solutions globally, and to provide technical support and advice on resource allocation for projects which are most likely to yield results in moving a particular refugee group towards solutions.

Through reallocation of some funds we have made available an initial 15 million dollars in 2014 as seed money to support such initiatives. Funding is being disbursed based on the submission of compelling proposals from the field demonstrating a clear and evidence-based strategy to achieve solutions. 42 proposals have already been submitted by field operations and are under consideration. Clearly the modest amount we have made available is

insufficient and we are hoping that donors would provide new, additional funds to complement and expand support for such solutions-oriented initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

The past year has been one of much reflection and consultation with regard to the roll-out of the Transformative Agenda, and how we fit the refugee operations and its co-ordination within the larger inter-agency humanitarian framework.

Based on extensive consultations internally and with external partners, including donors, we have developed a refugee co-ordination model that will preserve UNHCR's responsibility and accountability for refugees, but allow a flexible and pragmatic approach to avoid duplication with the cluster approach especially when there is a response to a mixed situation of refugees and IDPs. It will also enable us to clarify expectations that partners can have of our operations and in particular how our Representatives lead and manage co-ordination for a refugee operation in a way that is responsive to changes in the operating environment.

We hope to pilot test this model soon with the participation of OCHA and our partners. We look forward to a high-level bilateral meeting with OCHA in April, in which further clarification will be provided on this model.

Mr. Chairman,

As in the past, partnership remains at the foundation of our ability and capacity to respond. We have developed and updated strategic partnership agreements with a number of key NGOs, which will provide a sound basis for practical sectoral arrangements under our refugee coordination model.

Within the UN family, we are continuing to explore strategic and predictable relationships, so as to maximize on our respective comparative advantage. With WFP, within the framework of our existing close partnership, we are undertaking joint initiatives such as in promotion of self-reliance and livelihoods, the use of cash and vouchers, refinement of tools for targeted assessment, evaluation and joint approaches to operational challenges. With UNICEF we are exploring the possibility of more predictable engagement in refugee operations, particularly in sectors where they have capacity and expertise within our overall framework for co-ordination of refugee operations. We are also exploring new avenues for operationalizing our existing global MOU, that could open the door to greater synergy in UNICEF's country operations and refugee operations. The joint missions I have undertaken with my counterparts in WFP and UNICEF to a number of country operations have been most constructive and productive in generating new ideas for greater cohesiveness and collaboration between our agencies at the country level, and we intend to continue this best practice.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Partners and inter-agency collaboration have taken on a greater importance than ever before, not least because increasing numbers of refugees have to be assisted in non-camp settings, be they urban areas, or rural settlements, and notwithstanding the encampment policy of some refugee-hosting states. UNHCR has to protect and assist refugees whether they are inside or outside camps, but clearly the approach will have to be adjusted appropriately. In cognizance of this, we are establishing policy and operational guidelines to ensure a more systematic response to non-camp refugee situations. We need to build synergies with and support local

infrastructure and capacities which can benefit both host communities and refugees, and bring about greater normality in refugees' lives.

Enabling refugees toward meaningful livelihoods opportunities and basic services outside of camps through national structures – rather than creating parallel systems – is certainly more efficient and moves away from the camp-based protracted refugee situation. The response to refugees settled outside of camps requires a particularly high degree and new forms of collaboration with governments and partners.

For the countries most impacted by the Syria crisis, particularly Jordan and Lebanon, we have learned the lesson that partnership with development actors is not only necessary, but is also urgent and immediate, even as emergency needs are still unfolding.

Mr. Chairman,

I have focused strictly on operational issues, but I do want to stress that protection challenges and response underpin all of our operations globally, which I am sure the Bureau Directors will focus upon in their presentations. During my most recent mission in Myanmar and Thailand – from which I just returned yesterday – it is so evident that protection must be at the core of all that we do operationally and will require the utmost inventiveness in our operational response and partnerships with governments, civil society, and our persons of concern.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Before handing over the floor, I would once again like to thank you for your continued support to UNHCR. Most importantly, I would like to express my gratitude for your support – as hosts and/or donor nations – for our persons of concern.

Thank you very much.