



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Check against delivery

Agenda Item 3, “Regional Activities and Global Programmes”

**68th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner’s Programme**

14 - 16 March 2017, Conference Room XVIII, Palais des Nations, Geneva

**Introductory remarks by George OKOTH-OBBO, Assistant High Commissioner
for Operations to Agenda Item 3, “Regional Activities and Global
Programmes”**

Mr Chairman

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Heads of Delegations

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

UNHCR is very pleased for the opportunity to review with the 68th session of the Standing Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme the global refugee and displacement landscape as it stands today, the challenges that we face on it and the effectiveness of our joint efforts to address them.

In the last several annual sessions of the Committee, we have typically depicted a mixed picture. Today, you will hear from my colleagues the Regional Bureau and Division Directors who will under this agenda item overview our regional operations in Africa, the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle Eastern region and Global Programmes, this same duality of a refugee and forced displacement landscape that has, since we met here 12 months ago, been even more highly charged and deeply preoccupying. Yet, we have also, as in the past, continued to witness enduring and gratifying examples of solidarity, asylum and protection in the response that asylum-seekers and refugees have received from Governments, peoples and humanitarian actors all around the world. Many refugees have even got onto the path towards solutions, some of those paths relatively predictable, others more tentative and even contradictory again as you will hear today.

Let me, in introducing those presentations and the discussions we look forward to having with you, speak briefly speak to four main over-arching themes.

For the first of these, I turn back to the spiral of new or escalating displacements the pace, scale and, above all, sheer pain and suffering of which remain stupefying. As we meet here, those displacements are raging relentlessly in and from Mosul in Iraq, Southern Sudan, Yemen and the Northern Triangle of Central America. The picture could get even worse not only as the root crises continue or even get compounded, but if the spectre of famine in four critical situations - North-Eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen become the reality of intensify.

Our response must continue to be and remain strong and brisk. We have, over the last twelve months sought to deliver that response in a timely, sustained and dependable manner, even in situations in which security and access are dangerous, tenuous and uncertain. Yet, we must admit to key weaknesses across from reception conditions to asylum management procedures and systems themselves, overall protection response and humanitarian assistance - not least in the food pipeline - all of which have left thousands on the cusp of deep vulnerability even when they will have arrived in the countries in which they seek or expect to find safety. We see detention of asylum-seekers and even recognized refugees, including children and women who suffer other unbearable abuses including sexual violence and exploitation at unacceptable levels. And, of course, the toxification and stereotyping of refugee and migrant problematics, xenophobia and even violence that have greeted new arrivals and fanned or reinforced a panoply of strict measures and brought deep uncertainty in the way in which refugees are perceived and the international

community responds to their situation have added to the complexity of the situation.

As we see it, the humanitarian imperative, and the duty to protect asylum-seekers and refugees all remains commanding. You will thus hear from us today strong calls to buttress effectiveness of overall policy, legal, systemic, procedural and operational response and management across from emergency situations through to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the search for solutions. The system of asylum and protection based on well-established international law principles that has served mankind so abidingly these past over 65 years must be buoyed and sustained in the comprehensive, end-to-end, joined-up manner based on international and regional solidarity and responsibility sharing that the New York Declaration, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and many other frameworks such as the Brazil Plan of Action underline and commend.

Secondly, we will ring out once again the call for all efforts that will dynamize protracted situations which still heavily mark the refugee landscape and move them towards proper closure and lasting solutions. You will thus hear my colleagues echo both the dilemmas we still face with long-standing situations across whether in the western Balkans, Rwandese, Somali and Afghan and the Colombia situations, to name but only some of the most key ones, the efforts UNHCR is putting into moving the needle on these situations and the collaboration, support and indeed leadership that we look forward to from

States as by far the first line of both the stakeholders and responsibility bearers.

Thirdly, Mr Chairman, for these turn-arounds that we are urging, I would like to conclude by resounding, on behalf of UNHCR, that against the spectre of a tipping point on the horizon for the international system of refugee response, we, and of course our partners, are and remain resilient; resolute, strong and determined continue delivering effectively and accountably on the exceptional responsibility with which we are entrusted.

We have elaborated and instituted strategic directions to guide our work over the five years from now at the heart of which rests the centrality of the persons we are entrusted to serve. Those directions underline, among others, that we shall strive to respond to every situation in which our mandated responsibilities are exercised, always in the context of inclusive partnership, in the most effective manner possible to which end we are now completing a review of our emergency preparedness and response capabilities to enhance the gains and lessons learned over since our organizational emergency policy was instituted in 2015, once again to cement the centrality of our persons of concern and emphasize the role of local authorities and communities who are often the first to respond. We are also reviewing our engagement with IDPs to foster more predictability, sustainability and effectiveness. We know that all our responses have to be in step with and match the new vistas evolutions of the time. So, building on our experience since the mid-80s in using cash to deliver assistance, we are working to imbed CBIs even more systematically

across our operations – again in ways which rely strongly on partnership, complementarity and the leveraging of national social and economic systems and safety nets - over and above the 60 countries at the present moment to the value of more than USD 500 Million.

In all these respects, your support in all ways, in hosting refugees and extending to them protection and solutions, and in supporting us and our work - and that of our 930 partners globally whose crucial role I hereby acknowledge - not only financially, but also politically, remains critical and fundamental. The needs to which we and our partners have to respond are tremendous as you know and continue to grow. We have received from you now and over the years resolute support, yet, as we meet here today, our overall requirements of over \$7 Billion are funded globally at only around 14% as our other critical partners face similar challenges, for instance the World Food Programme which has been forced to implement reductions in food rations of up to 50% in key refugee operations affecting more than 2 Mio refugees. We call on our financial donors not only to sustain, but, particularly, increase your donorship to significantly more the 50% at which our requirements were funded in 2016, especially for the differentiated financial responses which are seeing some grossly underfunded programmes even facing an existential threat.

Thank you very much for listening to me.