

Remarks for the 81st Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
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Madam Chair, welcome back to Geneva – thank you for being with us.
Colleagues,

The last eighteen months have been hard on all of us. Illness, lockdowns, social distancing, isolation – they have taken a toll. And while we here in Switzerland and a few other countries are lucky to benefit from robust vaccination campaigns, and seeing a gradual easing of restrictions, many around the world continue to contend with the daily impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Few are impacted as profoundly as those people who are also caught in the wave of global displacement. They face the double jeopardy of living in exile, and the pandemic and associated restrictions with dramatic health and socio-economic consequences.

At the end of 2020, some 82.4 million people were in this situation -- forcibly displaced by a combination of persecution and conflict, a doubling of forcibly displaced people in the world in the past decade. An estimated 11.2 million people were forced from their homes in 2020 alone.

Some 48 million people are displaced inside their own countries, an increase which has driven our recent efforts to strengthen operational engagement in internal displacement situations. We aim to be as consistent and predictable in our support to internally displaced people as we are to refugees. Our strengthened engagement leverages the strength of partnerships and the capacity of displaced communities themselves such as in South Sudan, where we have partnered with local civil society to create conditions conducive for return, or for local stay, through area-based interventions. Solutions are at the centre of our internal displacement response as solutions for refugees and IDPs are closely inter-linked.

An additional 25 million people have sought safety and protection across international borders. Eighty per cent originate from just ten countries, many of which, including Syria, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, face continued conflict and instability.

The drivers of this displacement are well-known. They are longstanding or recurrent crises such as those in Somalia, Yemen, Venezuela, and South Sudan, together with the more recent crises in Ethiopia's Tigray region and Northern Mozambique. And while we have yet to understand fully the impact the pandemic has had on displacement, it is clear that the arrival of new refugees and asylum seekers was sharply down in most regions, reflecting the pandemic's detrimental effect on the ability of people to seek international protection, to which Assistant High Commissioner Gillian Triggs will speak tomorrow.

These statistics give us a sense of the enormous scale of the crisis, but they also depersonalise it. They hide the impact displacement has on individuals, families and communities. The stories of hardship and suffering. As well as the stories of resilience and hope.

Those are the experiences of Maria whom I met a couple of months ago in Tapachula, Mexico. She had fled Honduras due to a combination of domestic violence and the sexual harassment her teenage daughter faced from gang members and struggled with the burden of leaving her eldest daughter in Honduras as a critical medical condition prevented her from traveling together with the family. Having reached Tapachula, Maria struggled in the absence of legal status and lacking a stable livelihood.

Those are also the experiences of the 29 members of the Refugee Olympic Team who will take part in the Tokyo Olympics and whose stories speak in equal measures of hardship, resilience, and strength. This is the case for Masomah Ali Zada who, together with her family, returned to Afghanistan from exile in Iran, only to face threats to their safety and flee the country again. She now lives in France where she is pursuing a degree in civil engineering, while also training as a world class athlete.

Madam Chair,

At the risk of sounding dramatic, there is no immediate end in sight to the global displacement crisis, and to the hardship faced by Maria, Masomah, and the millions of others it has affected. Protracted conflicts, extreme weather and the economic fallout of COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing situations in 2020. This year offers an equally worrying outlook with conflicts continuing unabated.

The conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia is one of these situations, where the Security Council was warned last week that the protection crisis compounded by a rise in food insecurity and hunger due to conflict has meant more than 400,000 people have crossed the threshold into famine and another 1.8 million people are on the brink.

This is the ninth consecutive annual increase in the number of forcibly displaced people. Clearly, the need for preventing conflicts and ensuring that displaced people have access to solutions has never been more pressing.

We also must ensure that UNHCR is well positioned to respond to the needs of the millions of people who rely on us for protection and aid, to realise the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees, and to ensure the best possible use of the scarce resources you have entrusted to us. That is why we embarked on an ambitious transformation.

We have invested in partnerships aimed at collectively delivering better results, including through the World Bank as well as our partners within the UN Sustainable Development Group, in line with the Secretary General's development system reform agenda, especially through the Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

We have decentralized and moved structures, authorities and decision-making closer to the point of delivery, allowing for greater interaction with the people we serve and improving delivery of protection and aid to them. The Business Transformation Programme, which I mentioned at the last Standing Committee meeting, is the final, crucial step to complete these reforms. The Programme's goal is to deliver greater agility and simplification to UNHCR operations. Steven Corliss, the Director of Change, will elaborate on this programme and UNHCR's broader transformation process, a bit later.

This Programme is essential to ensure that UNHCR is prepared to meet the challenges ahead, proactively modernise tools which were designed and built well over a decade ago to meet the demands of a growing organisation, changed ways of working, and increasingly complex operating environments. To put it simply, we aim to make it possible for our personnel to work better, work faster and work smarter, to maximise the time and resources that are dedicated to the people we serve.

As with decentralisation and regionalisation, the key driver of these changes is the desire to ensure our organisation remains nimble and operationally focused. We want to continue to be leaders in business transformation in the system, which we are doing through our continued progress with the

Digital Solutions Centre and the global fleet mobility partnership we are advancing with the World Food Programme, on which I have briefed you on before.

Let me be clear. This is not about cutting costs. While we expect some efficiencies to come from streamlined processes and updated systems, the objective is to be able to allocate the maximum resources to programming: to ensure #More4Refugees.

I'm happy to say that we are already starting to see the dividends of this programme. The roll-out of Compass, the new tool for multi-year planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, in the first months of this year, has renewed our approach to results-based management and enabled operations to develop longer-term protection and solutions strategies. And changes introduced to our financial rules and budget management as part of the effort to introduce this new approach are helping us increase our reliance on evidence to allocate resources, providing better analysis of results, priorities and strategic shifts.

The initial planning exercise for 2022 is now nearing completion, with strategies submitted by over 130 entities for 2022, including 24 multi-year strategies. The completion of this first planning exercise with Compass and our new global results framework marks a significant organisational milestone as operations planned activities in line with self-defined results statements, using a simplified results chain and a framework aligned with the SDGs and in cooperation with other stakeholders. As with the roll out of any new tool or approach, this has not been without challenges and we have learned lessons which will lead to improvements in process and software in the near future.

The 2022 planning process also provides us with an opportunity to further the headquarters realignment initiated in early 2020. This process has led so far to substantial changes in the way select headquarters functions are discharged, including human resources support to operations, and further changes are expected over the coming years as headquarters functions are fully adapted to our new organisational setup. The Business Transformation Programme is a key driver of this effort.

Madam Chair,

At this mid-way point in the year, our operations are 27 per cent funded with \$2.4 billion dollars available. This falls significantly short of the \$9.1 billion dollars required to meet the needs of all under our care, and we are particularly concerned about the underfunding of the \$455 million dollar COVID19 appeal where needs remain significant and resources are required to ensure continued health care provisions, including last mile support to vaccination efforts. We appreciate the \$21 million that the US government recently provided to support our overall COVID response.

Adequate levels of funding are also essential to offset the dramatic socio-economic consequences the pandemic has had on displaced populations. We are finding in some countries that refugees are skipping meals or risk exploitation in their efforts to earn a daily income. And our colleagues in underfunded operations are facing the prospect of having to pick out the rare few who will receive cash support, leaving many in extreme need and resorting to negative coping mechanisms to survive.

But it is not all doom and gloom. So far, we have received more funds this year than at this same point last year thanks to timely pledges and contributions received from many of you. And a third of these contributions are flexible, allowing us to move quickly. This is crucial to our ability to ensure that people are served whether they are in high profile operations or in those under the radar but with people in equal or greater need.

So our deepest appreciation for your financial contributions, which we put to good use around the globe. And to those of you who host refugees, protect and provide for them and include them in your national systems, thank you too. We and partners continue to stand in strong solidarity with you – we are all grateful.

And as I recognize contributions from member states which provide aid, protection, and solutions to forcibly displaced people, I must also note the significant contribution and sacrifice that UNHCR's personnel and partners have made, particularly in the last 18 months. These have not been easy months, and our workforce, without exception, have remained steadfast in their commitment to serve. This has come with a cost -- close to 1,900 members of our workforce contracted COVID-19, some of them while working in remote locations, far from their families and loved ones, and far from medical facilities – 13 of our colleagues have lost their lives to the virus. Courageously, our heroic team with strong partners continue to protect and aid even in remote locations, thanks to the valiant efforts by many to strengthen local medical facilities, provide psycho-social support to colleagues, secure life-saving medical evacuations, and expedite vaccinations. We owe our robust efforts to serve to all of them, along whom I remain humbly proud to serve.

Thank you.