

**71<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of  
the High Commissioner's Programme**

**06 – 08 March 2018, Conference Room XIX, Palais des Nations, Geneva**

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

Thank you very much Chairperson.

On behalf of UNHCR, allow me to join you Ambassador DALIL, in welcoming your Excellencies Ambassadors, Heads of Delegation, Ladies and Gentlemen to the 71<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee.

What are the over-arching questions we wish to illuminate for your attention and to review with you?

In the overviews that you will hear region by region from my colleagues the Regional Bureau Directors under this agenda item, we will demonstrate, first how we are extending protection, assistance and finding solutions for the over 66 million people worldwide falling under the accountabilities which the international community has entrusted upon us. Unavoidably, we will echo the problems and challenges, some even apparently intractable, many of which you not be unfamiliar with. Yet, we will also underscore that in our operations everywhere around the world, vital progress is being achieved across the spectrum of our responsibilities and accountabilities. With the support, further efforts and attention which it is the objective of our conversation with you today to rally, opportunities to move even further forward can indeed be realized.

The decisive feature of the twelve months since the Committee last comprehensively reviewed these sets of questions with us at its 68<sup>th</sup> Session in March last year, has been an unrelenting, compelling and charged spell of forced displacement of people in typically dreadful and appalling

circumstances while long-drawn out situations – estimated at 12 million refugees by the end of 2016 – perservere. Between January and June 2017, the refugee population increased by 1.5 million or 7% as compared to 2016 year-end. Later in the year, from August 2017, nearly 700,000 Myanmar nationals were pressed into Bangladesh in search of safety under particularly heart-wrenching conditions. In Africa, over 35,000 Congolese were forced to flee into Angola as refugees and yet more are crossing into Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia even as meet here today. In the Americas, the protection features of Venezuelans leaving their country into the region and beyond, including, notably, the 134,000 that have formally sought asylum in USA, Brazil, Peru, Spain, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama and another 350,000 covered by alternative legal stay arrangements –are getting ever clearer, better understood and disseminated accordingly. Elsewhere, over 177,300 refugees and migrants arrived by sea and land in Europe, 119,200 of them in Italy alone across the Central Mediterranean in an odyssey in which over 3,000 people have lost their lives or gone missing, a damning metric indeed even if this is a 40% decrease as compared to 2016.

Meanwhile, from the DRC in the Great Lakes Region in Africa across to Yemen, Syria and elsewhere as you will hear in more detail, internal displacement also rages on, the situation in Eastern Ghouta in Syria being the most grim evocation today of their typically terrible plight. That situation underlines the urgency for conditions to be created that will allow badly needed humanitarian assistance to be delivered sustainably and predictably while also not permitting that same humanitarian assistance to become a fig leaf for the protection of civilians that must be assured resolutely and political solutions that should be found for the unrelenting underlying crisis that has exacted such incalculable human suffering.

And, finally, we have in this time continued to engage with and promote the eradication of the problem of statelessness across the world which affects an estimated 10 million people and progress in regard to which you will also hear in the respective overviews that the Bureau Directors will provide.

Chairperson,

The urgency to save lives and assure core protection has been overriding in many of the situations with which we have been engaged these past twelve months. Thus, I would like on behalf of UNHCR to acknowledge and appreciate publicly in a most special and earnest way those States, Governments, and peoples that have continued resolutely to accept on their territory people fleeing for their safety and to extend to them asylum or other mechanisms which yield a protection outcome including, in the Americas region, under the framework of the Brazil Plan of Action which should provide an inspiring example that can be emulated elsewhere. In that region and elsewhere, even where the resources already to meet national requirements may be limited, we continue to see both new and existing refugees being provided access to national basic health, education, social, economic and employment space and even freedom of movement and the opportunity more broadly to reclaim inclusion and participate in society in ways that are truly stellar and exceptional.

But if it is true that only ten countries are home to half of the world's total refugee population<sup>1</sup>, there can be no denying that this is a very heavy lift for the hosting Governments and communities. Thus, unfortunately, we see also

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<sup>1</sup> As of the end of 2016, Turkey hosted 3.2 million refugees; Pakistan 1.4 million; Uganda 1.3 million; Lebanon 1.0 million; Iran 978,700; Germany 864,700; Ethiopia 841,300; Jordan 700,000; Sudan 538,800; and DRC 533,700.

continue to see inadequacies in policy, capacity, services and transformative effect in the overall response, with refugees in many cases left entrenched in or exposed to conditions which can be as paltry or sometimes even worse than those they have escaped. Many children are severely malnourished, especially where resource limitations force emergency food, nutrition or other assistance including water, health, sanitation and shelter to be cut or restricted. No less than 3.5 million are out of school, potentially left even further behind. Sexual violence and exploitation can be rampant. Co-existence both within the refugee communities and with host communities can come under pressure. These problems sometimes feed into fractured policy, political, administrative or law and order responses in which refugees have ended up being refouled or even lives lost massively at the hands of national security or law enforcement agencies. We very much regret these developments and look forward to the investigations we have called for and other actions to punish and deter the transgressions or failures of refugee protection.

In fact, Chairperson, we are in a number of cases on the cusp of even more critical deteriorations. Let me highlight in this respect the Myanmar refugee situation in Kutupalong, Cox Bazaar in Bangladesh. There, the crush of new arrivals that I mentioned already has created a heavily congested situation and critically stressed services in a very difficult and fragile topographical setting which, as resolute and dedicated as has been the response that has been mounted by the Government, UNHCR and other humanitarian players nevertheless remains severely challenged. Yet, the monsoon season is on the way, bringing with it the prospect of an estimated one third of the settlement being flooded and landslides all of which will directly affect up to 100,000 refugees who will need to be relocated while the effects of destroyed shelter, WASH, and other facilities could escalate what is being alerted as an emergency within an emergency as health pandemics loom.

The Cox Bazaar situation is unquestionably one of the most urgent humanitarian situations on earth today. A considerable amount of contingency preparedness has already been and continues to be undertaken; yet it is evident that the enormity of the engineering, logistical and operational lifting that would assure an effective response could well exceed what the humanitarian actors are able by themselves to bring to bear. In line with the messaging we have all been purveying, the support and engagement of State / Government players, capabilities, specializations and packages, could most likely be called upon. I urge you most strongly please to follow this situation very closely indeed.

For these and other similar situations, we have on our part continued to reinforce, optimize and fully deploy our emergency preparedness and response capabilities to the full under the framework of the Organization's revised Policy on Emergency Preparedness and Response which the High Commissioner promulgated in July last year the main features of which are the introduction of a new "level-1" for enhanced preparedness which triggers automatic risk analysis and preparedness measures; automaticity of human, material, financial and programming support; reaffirmation of principles to guide leadership; a "whole-of-UNHCR" approach in level 3 emergencies; simplified internal coordination models for the field and Headquarters; and clear accountabilities at country level and Headquarters. We have continued investing in better risk analysis and joined hands with other agencies in regular global "horizon scanning" through the IASC reference group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness and other formal and informal forums. The Policy has made our institutional preparedness tool, the High Alert List for Emergency Preparedness (HALEP), mandatory for medium and high risk operations and enabled targeted support in preparedness to UNHCR's operations. There have been declarations of level 1 emergency for 2 countries

/ situations<sup>2</sup>; level 2 for 4 countries/operations<sup>3</sup> and level 3 for 2 other situations<sup>4</sup>. The organization has made 359 emergency deployments, representing 1,063 months or 31,881 days of emergency staffing support to field operations and core relief items (CRIs) worth US\$ 55 million from the Global Stocks to emergency situations. And under the whole-of-UNHCR approach, in addition to emergency deployments from the rosters (which typically last up to 3 months for UNHCR and 6 months for Stand-by Partners), staff was redeployed from both the operations and UNHCR Headquarters. 82 such missions were undertaken in support of Bangladesh operation only, in addition to 117 deployment and temporary forms of staffing support to other operations. Stand-by partners continued to provide critical support including 110 staff deployments [mostly to South Sudan situation, Uganda, Myanmar and Bangladesh] and the deployment of “service packages” such as the IHP/MSB basecamps in northern Uganda and Bangladesh which facilitated humanitarian access, duty of care to humanitarian and more manageable working environment in the settlements close to the refugees<sup>5</sup>.

We have also continued the Office’s efforts in institutionalizing innovations and seminal applications within the organization’s work. The CRRF, which you will hear about in more detail in other sessions of this meeting, is of course the most profound game changer that the organization is fronting including, in particular, its enhancement of solutions, resilience and the inclusion of refugees through development activities. We are at the same time expanding the systematic use of cash in our programmes and have delivered some

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<sup>2</sup> In all, UNHCR has declared Level 1 emergency in three cases: Republic of Congo; Zambia and the Venezuela Situation.

<sup>3</sup> In all, UNHCR has made six Level 2 emergency declarations, namely for Angola, Uganda/DRC influx, Nigeria/Cameroon influx, Libya, Burundi situation, Nigeria situation)

<sup>4</sup> In all, UNHCR has made seven L3 emergency declarations, namely for the Syria Situation, South Sudan Situation, Iraq Situation, Nigeria/Lake Chad, Yemen, Bangladesh, and DRC(IDPs).

<sup>5</sup> In February 2018, UNHCR co-chaired the Standby Partnership’s yearly Annual Consultations in Geneva, bringing together over 40 different Standby Partner agencies from government, NGOs, the private sector and United Nations to discuss how the deployment of key experts can have greater impact on our work and the lives of the people we serve by being more strategic.

US\$502 million in cash to some 8 million persons of concern in some 94 country operations, 60% of this delivered through Multipurpose Cash Grants (MCGs). The “focus” countries for institutional CBI roll-out have grown in 2018 to 20 from six in 2016 in the march to an overall target of 50 by 2020; over 3,000 staff have been trained in CBI in this period and the organization can confidently assert that it is one of the two largest players in cash transfer programming along with WFP. And, on another vital front, following an internal review, the organization is working to reposition our engagement with IDPs to be more predictable, dependable and effective.

Madam Chairperson,

Turning to another important over-arching point, I wanted now to summarize what you will hear from my colleagues with regard to solutions at large and, in particular, the return home and reintegration of refugees but was not sure what to emphasize. Across from the Asia region, home to the single largest repatriation movements which occurred in 2017, over 50,000 registered Afghan refugees who were assisted to return home, to Africa where there were several movements including of Somali refugees back home from Kenya and Yemen; or Sudanese refugees from the CAR; Burundese from Tanzania and so on, repatriation as a whole has remained relatively modest while even under initiatives such as the Rwandese Refugee Comprehensive Solutions Strategy (CSS) which formally came to an end in December 2017, refugees covered by that strategy remain in exile with whom UNHCR will thus have to maintain the relevant engagements as well of course with the concerned asylum countries to ensure that the appropriate outcomes in each case are finally duly realized. Across the board, decisive steps remain urgently needed to create

conditions which will enable refugees to make the decision voluntarily to return to their countries of origin with trust and confidence in conditions of, as we are particularly stressing at the present moment for Myanmar refugees, are safe, secure and will enable a dignified and sustainable return.

Chairperson

Allow me now to now on an issue of keen preoccupation to us, and indeed to many of you, namely the instances of fraud and corruption which have over the period under review occurred in our operations, notably in Kenya and Uganda and attracted, among others, so much media attention both locally and internationally. In the case of Kenya, UNHCR staff, acting with others from outside the Office, was found to have corruptly and criminally exacted payments from refugees for services they were entitled to receive without any charge or payment, personal or official. In Uganda, the allegations involve fraud by Government refugee management officials although UNHCR and other partners concerned have mounted their own comparable internal investigations to establish if any of our staff and partners were also involved.

I wish to underline, first, that UNHCR takes extremely seriously every form of fraud, corruption, abuse or other misconduct which compromise our general and particular accountability and due diligence. In these and all other cases, we have pursued and will continue to pursue – both by ourselves and in concert with the official authorities and of course our partners – all the necessary administrative, management and other corrections without fear or favour. There has not been and will be no hesitation to terminate the services of staff found to have betrayed the trust that we hold for and owe to the persons we are entrusted to serve.

In this connection, I want to recognize that the Governments concerned have themselves taken steps to investigate the allegations, including, in the relevant case, suspension of the alleged wrong-doers, and follow-through with the necessary legal and judicial enforcement steps. UNHCR is cooperating fully with those Governments in the pertinent ways and has been and will remain as transparent as possible in sharing information on developments with the relevant stakeholders.

UNHCR recognizes that the vulnerabilities, circumstances, contexts, dynamics, management and oversight lapses in which the fraud and corruption occurred in the particular cases I am talking about are prevalent in regional and country contexts elsewhere. Thus, as you will recall, the High Commissioner has at the Executive Committee last October, launched a global risk-management project to enhance integrity, oversight, due diligence and accountability across our operations. The Deputy High Commissioner is coordinating this effort at leadership level and will, I am sure, when she talks with you tomorrow reflect on some of its main elements.

Madam Chairperson, let me foreshadow now the important point about access and security that will also resound in the presentations that will follow mine, including in respect of Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia where we face some of the most significant security challenges. In these and other operational theatres across the world, UNHCR operations, its premises, assets and staff are exposed to all manner of security incidents, crime, hazards and incidents, 404 in all reported in 2017. Thankfully, no UNHCR personnel was lost in the line of duty in this period although one locally recruited staff member was killed while on personal leave in his home

country, four seriously injured in security incidents and one abducted although eventually released. Moreover, our staff can often be collaterally in harm's way, as occurred for example an incident in May 2017 in a terrible bomb attack in Kabul, Afghanistan which, though not targeted at UNHCR, caused damage to its office and guesthouse nearby, the second time this had happened in as many years, prompting decision to relocate premises. UNHCR attaches the greatest attention to the security and safety of its staff and has on its global workforce some 75 international security positions and almost 200 locally recruited security staff and has continued to make investments, both by itself and in concert with United Nations security management in security enhancement including strengthening an organization-wide culture of security and to situate security within a wider/more holistic frame of duty of care to our personnel including medical, psychosocial and administrative support all of which clearly are having positive effects. Yet, we voice concern over the trend of attacks that impact our colleagues and of course have unwavering solidarity for our partners who have suffered increasing fatalities. As threat factors – conflict/instability and spread of extremist ideologies groups – persist so must we sustain our vigilance and investments especially when it concerns our nationally recruited staff who continue to bear the brunt of serious security incidents and the risk of harassment, intimidation, detention and ethnic or sect-related violence both in absolute numbers and proportionally.

Chairperson, unavoidably, I have concentrated in these remarks on UNHCR, what we are doing and our issues. But, ever before and particularly in the foot wells of, first the World Humanitarian Summit and more immediately the CRRF, I wish to reiterate, and acknowledge that, across the world, in all the 130 countries and 468 locations in which we work, partnership – with Governments of course and agency actors – of the United Nations, international and non-governmental organizations – and increasingly with the

private sector and development actors - is fundamental to what UNHCR does and hopes to achieve. In 2017 UNHCR was engaged with a total of 1,035 partners globally including 178 Government and governmental agencies and 648 nongovernmental organizations. I renew to them UNHCR's thanks and appreciation for the solidarity that we share together in discharging our joint responsibilities to the persons we are entrusted to protect, assist and work to find solutions for.

Concluding now, let me, Chairperson, come to money matters. Even in the humanitarian universe, money talks. What it is saying more and more is that we continue to need ever more of it. For the period we are reviewing now, our final comprehensive requirements at the year-end stood at US\$ 7.963 billion, an increase of US\$ 653 million over the ExCom-approved budget of US\$ 7.310 billion. Against these requirements, we received US\$ 3.9 billion in contributions, including US\$ 3.5 billion from public sources and US\$400 million from the private sector. With a carry overs from the 2016 operational year, the contribution we receive from the UN regular budget and other income sources our total income stood at US\$ 4.4. billion in all or 55% of the overall requirements. Our funding requirements for the current, 2018 operational year stand at US\$8.276 Billion<sup>6</sup>. Contributions recorded to date stand at US\$ 1.269 billion<sup>7</sup>.

We acknowledge that the contributions the Office has received as reviewed above are quite important and vital especially considering that just 10 donors provide no less than 78% of the Office's reported income.

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<sup>6</sup> Which includes a \$768 million increase over the ExCom approved budget of US\$ 7.508 billion covering the Congolese, South Sudan, Venezuela, Central Mediterranean, Syria and Myanmar (Bangladesh) Situations.

<sup>7</sup> Including contribution from the UN Regular Budget but excluding any carry-over or other secondary income from 2017.

I would thus like very much to reiterate UNHCR's deep appreciation to all our financial donors for all your support without which it is true that we would not be able to do what we could accomplish. Yet, vital as they are, the contributions still represented a funding gap of 45% as compared with the comprehensive needs. This shortfall can be even be a matter of life and death especially for the chronically underfunded operations<sup>8</sup> or as matched to the volume of the overall requirements, and the urgency in the timeliness with which the contributions are needed as in many of the cases they are emergency situations, the gap can be quite critical<sup>9</sup>. UNHCR will continue resolutely our efforts to broaden and deepen our donor and resource mobilization base. But I am sure you will indulge me if, for those who are already doing so much, we ask you to do yet more. And, beyond money matters to leverage political, economic, geostrategic, multilateral, regional or bilateral diplomacy in ways which will positively affect humanitarian objectives.

Thank you very much for listening to me; thank you Mr Chairman.

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<sup>8</sup> Of which the most acute were the Central African Republic Situation which was funded at only 12% (or a gap \$183.2M); the Burundi situation, funded at 15% or a shortfall of \$212 M; the Congolese situation which was funded at 22% funded or a gap of \$79.7; the Somalia situation which was funded at 24% funded or a gap of \$371.1M; and the South Sudan situation which was funded at 36% or a gap of \$564M. By country operation, the top underfunded cases were: Burundi which was funded at only 14% of the requirements or a gap of \$29M; Rwanda, funded at 19% or a gap of \$84M; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which received 23% of its requirements or a gap of \$175M; Chad, funded at 25 % funded and falling \$124M short; Cameroon which was funded at 28% and had a gap of \$ 67.4 M; Ethiopia which was funded at 30% of its requirements or a gap of \$234M; and Tanzania which, funded at 30% of its requirements, had a gap of \$97M.

<sup>9</sup> To highlight the situation, the Burundi Refugee Situation Response Plan (RRP) for which \$391.2Million is required has funding of only \$14.2M or just 4% reported; the Nigeria RRP where the requirements amount to \$156.6M has only \$13M or 8% reported in funding; and the South Sudan Situation RRP for which \$1.5Billion is required has only \$55.4M or 4% reported.