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UNHCR'S INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) STRATEGY

1. This paper sets out elements of a strategy for the improved use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) resources in UNHCR. A fuller presentation of the ICT strategy will be made in 2005, bearing in mind that a new Division has very recently been created and that a consultancy review currently under way will not be completed until later in 2004.

I. BACKGROUND

2. UNHCR possesses funding, staffing, programme and information resources that could be better managed through enhanced information technology. The need for an updated strategy on information technology and telecommunications in UNHCR is well recognized. In mid-2004 an important step was taken in the rationalization of ICT within the Office with the creation of a new Division of Information Systems Technology (DIST), headed by a Chief Information Officer (CIO). The new Division comprises the Information Technology and Telecommunications Service (ITTS) and the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP). Merging these units makes it possible to rationalize administrative and staffing budgets, and more importantly to consolidate technological and functional expertise, while providing long-term in-house support for the new systems. UNHCR plans to incorporate other ICT activities currently under the responsibility of other organizational units into the Division, as appropriate. A significant consequence of the consolidation of ICT into one management structure will be to facilitate the development of a longer-term ICT strategy.

II. CURRENT TIMEFRAME

3. In further support of these organizational changes, a review of Information and Communications Technology service provision at UNHCR is planned for the last quarter of 2004. The review, to be undertaken by external consultants, covers the provision of ICT services at Headquarters and in the Field, and includes both traditional service providers (i.e. ITTS) and other groups with significant ICT service roles, notably MSRP and the Electronic Publishing Unit.

4. The review will examine the present state of ICT service provision, and will make specific recommendations for improvement in the following areas:

- ICT governance function
- ICT organizational structure
- ICT senior management skills requirements
- ICT technologist skills requirements
- ICT service delivery
- project management
- change management / transition planning.

5. The major thrust of the current ICT activity of the Office remains firmly focused on delivery of the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP). The MSRP foresees the renewal of long outdated administrative systems, the core of which include financial, supply chain, human resources management and payroll systems. The new systems are based on PeopleSoft software, and have already been deployed at Headquarters and in UNHCR's Regional Office in Brussels.

6. The MSRP management was strengthened in mid-2004 and project plans have been reviewed and refocused. Implementation of additional budget functionality is currently under development, as this is a pre-requisite for delivery to the Field. Other functional components are currently under review.

III. 2005 AND BEYOND

7. The launch of the planned roll-out of the MSRP systems to field offices is imminent. Beginning with a small number of pilot sites (end 2004/early 2005), MSRP will be deployed progressively to all field offices requiring the functionality provided, subject to infrastructural constraints (such as telecommunications connectivity) which may delay its implementation in some instances. Planning for the comprehensive deployment to the Field will be undertaken jointly with field colleagues and Headquarters staff with field experience. A process of co-development and product validation is foreseen, through which existing field-based systems will be compared with the new system, and Headquarters processes will be adjusted for use in the Field as required.

8. Work has commenced on a significant expansion of the scope of the MSRP. Preparatory work already completed has resulted in the issuance of a Request for Proposal (RFP) to provide the technical skills for the configuration and customization, where necessary, of the Human Resources (HR) and Payroll modules of PeopleSoft. It is expected that the successful bidder (a company with comprehensive technical skills in the area of global HR and Payroll solutions based on PeopleSoft) will commence work on-site with the MSRP team at the turn of the year. This should result in preliminary deliverables for HR administration towards the end of 2005, and replacement of the Payroll system in early 2006.

9. ITTS started the technological upgrading of field office LANS in 2003. This has continued in 2004 and will be concluded by the end of 2005. Outdated satellite telecommunications systems will also be upgraded. The conversion to the newer technology will have a larger bandwidth, permitting faster access from field offices to support the PeopleSoft system. The new registration system *ProGres*, which is the computer systems portion of the PROFILE refugee registration project, will be rolled out to field offices with ITTS support.

IV. ACTIVITIES CONTINUING BEYOND 2005

10. The Information Technology and Telecommunications Service (ITTS) has outlined a number of initiatives to:

- investigate opportunities to improve emergency monitoring, planning and management through the use of technology;
- implement systems to assist with collecting field security information to help determine security alert levels and to assist with monitoring, planning and management activities;
- enhance UNHCR response capacity in the Field through standby resource agreements with donor governments, retainer contracts and a standby stockpile;
- encourage development of telecommunications standards amongst UNHCR and sister United Nations organizations to ensure inter-operability and improve field operations;
- continue the roll-out of the *ProGres* system to field offices and eventually replace all outdated registration systems; plan and implement the next version of this system; and continue to increase the functionality of the product;
- investigate the possibility of greater use of Open Source software. If implemented in UNHCR this could significantly reduce licensing costs. Open Source software should include alternatives to Microsoft Office products, Novell Email systems, the client operating system, the server operating system, the Internet Browser and other utilities which UNHCR would otherwise be obliged to buy;
- put in place a robust disaster recovery plan for both IT and telecommunications services, to support business continuity.

V. INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

11. As was reported last year, UNHCR agreed with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as well as the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to contract the services of a hosting provider with Unisys Corp. and its subcontractor, Corio Inc. During 2004, a successful migration of the new systems from computers in Geneva to an outsourced facility in the United States was completed, in conformance with an agreement signed with UNDP in 2003. Under the terms of this agreement, UNHCR will benefit from using the services of a commercial outsourcer, sharing the costs of the exercise with UNDP.

12. It is anticipated that there will be increasing opportunities for inter-agency sharing of information and lessons learned. UNHCR will continue to participate actively in the United Nations system-wide ICT Network, and will place particular emphasis on working closely with other United Nations agencies also deploying PeopleSoft software.

VI. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF AN ICT STRATEGY

13. The new CIO and his management team have commenced work on the development of a longer term and more comprehensive ICT strategy, for presentation in due course. One key area for development will be to link UNHCR's programming activities to the budget. The programming procedures have been reviewed to put a greater emphasis on the formulation of objectives, including intended impact, for the Office's beneficiaries, as well as the identification of outputs and performance indicators. While this has proven to be very useful in promoting more effective and efficient management of UNHCR's operations, the development of new automated tools to link the planning framework with budgets remains necessary. The Deputy High Commissioner has established an interdisciplinary Task Force to look at this next step. The Task Force hopes to benefit, in this regard, from the work being done by the United Nations Secretariat on the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS).

14. UNHCR proposes to initiate informal discussions in mid-2005 on the outlines of its IT strategy, with a view to presenting a comprehensive strategy to the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee in September 2005.