

UNHCR - 55th Standing Committee – 18-19 September 2012

Agenda item 5 - Update on coordination issues: strategic partnerships (EC/63/SC/CRP.21)

Presented by: Ms. Daisy Dell, Director, Division of External Relations

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the course of the last year, coordination and partnerships have taken on a stronger than ever significance in UNHCR's work and in particular in major field operations. Several reasons account for this heightened attention:

- 1) 2012 witnessed the ***simultaneous escalation of conflicts and proliferation of emergencies*** resulting in major population displacement in and around South Sudan, Syria, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – requiring a large-scale humanitarian response. In each one of these operations, the response involves many actors and hence coordination is absolutely crucial.
- 2) Secondly, over the past year and a half, there have been intense discussions at Principals' and Directors' level in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on improving inter-agency coordination and the effectiveness of a collective humanitarian response. These efforts are known as the ***Transformative Agenda*** which focuses on leadership, coordination and accountability amongst humanitarian actors.
- 3) Last but not least, there has been a strong push from donor and host countries alike to ***ensure that the funds put at the disposal of the humanitarian system reach the best results for the people of our concern***. Like other humanitarian actors, UNHCR is facing challenges in prioritizing and re-prioritizing the limited funds it has, while responding to new crises and major protracted situations. Today's humanitarian challenges require a vigorous and sustained response based on greater financial and human resources but they have also brought to the fore the need to strengthen UNHCR's coordination capacity and outreach to partners.

Conference Room Paper EC/63/SC/CRP.21 provides you with an update on coordination issues. You will find there a systematic review of UNHCR's key strategic partnerships – many of which have been established for numerous years – with United Nations sister agencies, intergovernmental and

non-governmental actors and the private sector. I would like to focus this oral presentation on mainly highlighting new elements and key changes in UNHCR's outlook and approach towards partnership and coordination. My points are predominantly on the humanitarian response, while there is much else happening on other fronts too, as described in the conference room paper in more detail.

[Transformative Agenda and partnerships]

In 2012, the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has focused on a thorough review of the system-wide humanitarian response to large-scale emergencies.

I have already reported to this Committee on our commitment to ***the Transformative Agenda initiative*** led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos. The High Commissioner has in fact been one of the key players in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Principals' meetings, and has been consistently engaged in shaping the outcomes of those discussions. He has impressed upon the organization the importance of stepping up to the mark in terms of leadership, accountability and coordination and ***UNHCR is taking action on two levels: Continued engagement within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and adjustments of the Office's internal procedures.***

As for the former, together with other members of the IASC, the Office is focusing on the roll-out of the ***Transformative Agenda*** to the field. It is in this context that UNHCR is participating in the IASC mission to Chad next week to provide input in this important exchange at field level to validate various aspects of the Transformative Agenda in so called non-Level 3 emergencies. This mission is in line with an earlier field testing mission undertaken by IASC members to South Sudan.

With regard to the ***adjustments of internal procedures***, for UNHCR, the implementation of the Transformative Agenda means playing our agreed roles in the cluster approach for Internally Displaced Persons as well as we can, committing expert leadership and coordination capacity in complex emergencies and stepping-up internal response capacity for what are now termed system-wide Level 3 emergencies. This has led us to review and consolidate our various agency specific training programmes, and in particular to strengthen our leadership training as well as to adjust our internal policies and procedures for emergency deployments and coordination roles to better fit the agreements made at the inter-agency level.

[Roll-out to UNHCR field operations]

Let me now turn to the ***roll-out to UNHCR's field operations.***

The Assistant High Commissioner for Operations has addressed an organization-wide communication to all staff, ensuring that colleagues in Headquarters and in the field understand the changes brought about by the roll-out of the Transformative Agenda.

The dynamics of change have really begun to play out at the field level.

The Office has sent colleagues engaged in these policy discussions to key field operations such as South Sudan, the Horn of Africa, and the Mali situation, expressly to consult widely with partners and to develop, with and for our colleagues in the field, ***guidance on partnership, leadership and coordination in refugee emergencies.*** We are also systematically briefing and exchanging with Representatives and senior colleagues from field operations in any available training session or meeting, promoting an enhanced approach to coordination and partnerships at the operational level.

Although the cluster approach is not applicable to refugee situations, the roll-out of the Transformative Agenda has led us in UNHCR to also examine our leadership and coordination role as well as the Office's accountabilities in refugee emergencies.

One of the great challenges for colleagues is ***ensuring that multi-sectoral coordination for refugees has a good interface with any broader humanitarian response coordination.*** We have clarified our approach here and encouraged full exchange and consultation with clusters and the Humanitarian Country Team where they exist; we promote streamlined and partner-friendly coordination meetings and helpful coordination products. We encourage a pragmatic approach that takes into account the approaches and expectations of our partners.

In some major operations such as Syria and Mali, UNHCR has ***established the position of a Regional Refugee Coordinator*** to interact more effectively with inter-agency coordination mechanisms for the overall humanitarian response targeting Internally Displaced Persons.

UNHCR has also tried hard to ***improve the Office's refugee coordination capacity in key operations*** and to reach out to partners and to communicate better on both strategy and substance. For example, we clarified and communicated to partners, the Humanitarian Coordinator and other stakeholders how refugee coordination works in South Sudan, where a complicated inter-agency structure and indeed, an integrated mission, oversee the broad humanitarian strategy and response.

We have also tried to ***deliver on our coordination role for refugees in a more systematic way*** than in the past. For example, UNHCR has taken the lead on putting together the ***Regional Response Plan for the Syria situation***, an UNHCR-led inter-agency appeal for Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, and we are receiving positive feedback on our coordination role and field-up consultations which have been helpful to partners and have brought coherence to the humanitarian response to this complex situation.

We have understood the importance of supporting the coordination role – for example by strengthening our capacity for information management to better serve partners and stakeholders in the field. Many of you will have seen the Office’s various web portals displaying operational data and information from the Horn of Africa, Syria situation, and South Sudan, to name a few.

[Strategic dimension of some of our key partnerships]

In light of these developments we are also ***revisiting the strategic dimension of a number of our long established partnerships***.

With regard to UN sister agencies, UNHCR is working hard to achieve a closer and more predictable collaboration with its major operational partners in refugee emergencies. With UNICEF, for example, the Office has now developed several country level Letters of Understanding (LoUs) to capture and promote areas of tighter collaboration and shared expertise in refugee emergencies. These are being developed and implemented in all the major emergency situations right now – Kenya and Ethiopia, the Mali situation countries, the Syria situation countries.¹

High level missions with WFP and with UNICEF to key operations in the field are also used to look at strategic and operational coordination aspects.

[HC’s structured dialogue with NGOs]

I will finish by mentioning to you an ***initiative of the High Commissioner this year to review the quality of our partnerships with NGOs*** and to explore with them how to strengthen and improve operational and strategic partnerships. A first round of consultations has taken place immediately after our regular Annual NGO Consultations in June. Some 70 participants contributed to a frank exchange on transparency, communications, attitudes and collaboration in operations. There is

¹ Signed LoUs to date: Ethiopia; Close to completion: Kenya and Niger; In process: Chad, S. Sudan, and Burkina Faso. In addition, cooperation is very close in Jordan and Lebanon but not formalized in a LoU.

increased pressure on partnerships from a Results Based Management and financial reporting perspective for which new systems have been developed and implemented. Despite these challenges, UNHCR is determined to ensure that Implementing Partnerships are based on mutual respect, a common understanding, based on regular consultation, of protection and operational challenges, and agreement on strategic objectives.

The Structured Dialogue will culminate in an event with the High Commissioner in December 2012 and should provide a firmer basis on which to meet each other's expectations. The High Commissioner is convinced that the full potential of these partnerships should be explored, given the enormous challenges we are jointly facing.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Traditionally, UNHCR has been perceived in some quarters as measured and sometimes reluctant in its approach to partnerships. I hope, I could point out some of the concrete steps the Office has taken in the last year and a half to refute this impression and to demonstrate UNHCR's full commitment to effective partnerships and coordination as well as the Office's strong engagement with partners on all fronts.

In conclusion, partnership and coordination have taken on an increased prominence in UNHCR over the last 18 months and fundamental changes are taking place both in attitude and approach.

Thank you for your kind attention.