

**56th Meeting of the Standing Committee
Geneva, 5 March 2013**

**Introduction to Regional Activities and Global Programmes
Statement by Ms. Janet Lim,
UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Operations**

Madame Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

In this session of the Standing Committee we will review with you our operations during the past year in the regions covered by our five bureaux. This is now my fourth year, as the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, and I have to say that, this past year stands out as being the most challenging in terms of the number and magnitude of crises we have had to respond to simultaneously, with unprecedented demands being made on the financial and human resources of the organisation.

Just in the recent past, we have had to mount emergency operations and/or significantly reinforce operations in the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt. It's a long list, but this list does not even include the emergency operations carried over from the past two years, such as Liberia, Kenya, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, and others.

It is concerning that we are facing a trend of unrelenting crises around the world with all their tragic and dramatic humanitarian consequences - whether it be refugees having to flee to neighbouring countries, or populations forced to seek refuge in safer areas of their own countries.

Having recently visited our operations in the Syria and Mali crises, it is difficult to find words to describe the extreme challenges that UNHCR, our partners, and host Governments face in trying to meet the needs of thousands of refugees and IDPs in areas difficult to access, either for logistical, physical or security reasons. For example, the challenges of hosting thousands of refugees in areas already drought-stricken and food insecure as in the Sahel; or ensuring that assistance is provided and urgent protection needs are met amongst a continuing flood of refugees – sometimes up to ten thousand arrivals per day, as we are seeing in the Syria Situation, or the hundreds of thousands of civilians inside Syria who could not be reached because of the continued fighting.

It is just as difficult to put into words the level of efforts that everyone is putting in to overcome these challenges. In the field, even with the increased staff capacity drawn from our operations all over the world or from our partners, we have had to double or triple the shifts of working hours, while taking mitigating measures against the risk to staff and beneficiaries. In headquarters, we have activated every emergency mechanism we have, while drawing lessons to make our response ever more efficient. For example, we have had to adjust our models for rapidly identifying, assigning, and deploying staff to emergencies. We have improved our ability to quickly and more cost-effectively move and deliver core relief items from warehouses to the point of delivery. We have increased our capacity to ensure the most appropriate and essential basic needs, such as shelter, are met in a locally appropriate and efficient manner. Further, and drawing from past lessons, we have instituted mechanisms to ensure sound financial management, even if flexibility and quick actions are needed for the emergency. Yet, it is clear that there are still gaps, such as in ensuring that our technical

response is rapid from an emergency's onset, and that technical experts must be strong and strategic coordinators and leaders, in addition to being technically-able. We are bolstering our ability to provide the most reliable, useful, and up-to-date data and information on refugee operations through a platform appropriate for today's digital age.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

While emergencies are consuming most of our attention, we are also mindful that protracted situations and the search for solutions cannot be neglected. In this respect, I would like to recall the High Commissioner's closing statement at the last Executive Committee, where he spoke of "Dilemmas". The High Commissioner's message and the contrasting challenges facing our Organisation globally have only become sharper since he gave that statement just a few months ago. Although available resources increased last year, reaching the highest level ever, thanks to the generosity of our donors, these resources were, nevertheless, consistently outpaced by the ever increasing needs all across the board in our operations. Our dilemma is that we cannot only focus on one critical area of need at the expense of others, but rather we need to find the right balance which would maximize opportunities in the specific operations and their contexts.

As the Bureau Directors' presentation will inform you, while striking that balance, we have, however, not had sufficient resources to optimally achieve solutions which would otherwise seem in our reach - such as for the Angolan, Liberian, and Rwandan Situations. Although we will continue to assist thousands of refugees to achieve durable solutions this year and in the future, we will not be able to achieve our objectives for refugee solutions on our own.

For this reason, it is ever more important for us to reach out to the development community. We have done so and continue to do so, for example with the *Transitional Solutions Initiative* in Eastern Sudan and Colombia, the *Sarajevo Process* and *Regional Housing Program* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, and in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan with the *Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees*. Through these and other programmes throughout the world, we are seeking community-based solutions which promote livelihoods and the well-being of refugees, returnees, and those hosting refugees in their homes and villages.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

Within the organization we have embarked on an all-out campaign to build partnership, fully appreciating the capacities that partners can bring to all of our operations and all of our persons of concern. We aim to have both a quantitative and qualitative change in the partnerships we build. This approach applies to the most dynamic emergencies and the most protracted situations, where we will find effective ways to engage with all partners - from donor and host countries, to other UN agencies, to international and national NGOs, down to the smallest community-based organisations. At our recent Global Representatives Meeting, where all of UNHCR's Representatives from around the world were present, the issue of partnership was very substantively discussed and very clear messages were delivered to all of our Representatives.

Of particular note is our solid and predictable global partnership with the World Food Programme, which has withstood the test of time. It provides us with a model we would like to replicate with other key partners, notably UNICEF. Currently, discussions are underway

with UNICEF to arrive at a global understanding for a more predictable relationship in our operations. At the same time we are already encouraging country-level co-operation with UNICEF, as a key operational partner, where we can take advantage of each other's technical and coordination strengths for the benefit of our persons of concern.

Our ability to access technical capacity quickly and affordably through rosters managed by our NGO and Government partners has been essential to all of our operations, and particularly the ongoing emergencies. Without these rosters it would not have been possible to ensure both a technically-sound and very rapid response.

I would like to take this opportunity to also highlight the importance of national and local NGOs and community-based organisations to our operations. They are often the first on the scene, and will certainly remain long after UNHCR leaves. They have the local knowledge and the *savoir-faire* needed to work directly with our persons of concern. Not only that, with the increasingly insecure operating environments where we must function, local organizations are often the most effective in accessing our persons of concern. We are therefore investing in local and national NGOs. There are dozens of initiatives – at the local, national, and regional levels, and even here at the Headquarters level – building local NGOs' capacity not only in technical service delivery, but also in financial control, grant and proposal writing, and organizational management, to ensure that the investment is sustainable, as we see this as a long-term contribution to not only the organisations themselves, but also to their home countries.

Also as you know, last year the High Commissioner's Structured Dialogue with NGOs from around the world resulted in a re-affirmation of the Principles of Partnership and a detailed framework for continued close partnership. Senior management of UNHCR were closely engaged in the Dialogue and will be following up with our NGO partners to move forward the action points agreed upon.

I cannot talk about Partnership, without making reference to the Transformative Agenda, which systematises and exemplifies the partnership needed with all member agencies of the IASC in complex emergencies. We continue to be fully engaged as the Transformative Agenda now moves into its roll-out and implementation phase.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

I have confined my remarks thus far to strictly operational issues. There have of course been important developments on the Protection front as well in many of our operations around the world, which the Bureau Directors will also focus on in their presentations. Both on the operational and protection fronts, we have faced formidable challenges, but I have also been inspired by the many creative and innovative ways colleagues have been able to meet these challenges. I hope that in the presentations by the Directors of Bureaux and Divisions over the next two days, you will hear about some of the ingenious and strategic approaches developed to increase or preserve protection and asylum space, as well as the technical tools developed to improve operations through data and information management and registration, and important innovations related to shelter, domestic energy, the use of mobile technology, and cash and voucher programmes for persons of concern. However, given the magnitude of challenges, not least financial resources and the extreme physical and security environment on the ground, we are fully cognizant that we have not been able to meet the minimum standards in some of the essential areas such as WASH, health and other basic services in

some of our operations. On this, I would like to urge our partners to work with us, in a constructive manner, to overcome these challenges for the benefit of the persons of concern. We are all in the same camp, where we must advocate for and not against each other.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates,

Before handing over the floor, I would once again like to thank you for your continued support for UNHCR and most importantly for our persons of concern.

Thank you.