

Remarks for the 86th Standing Committee meeting
Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme
Kelly T. Clements, Deputy High Commissioner
07 to 09 March 2023

Madam Vice Chair,
Excellencies,

On the night of 5 February, I left for a 10-day mission to Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. This was a trip long planned. I wanted to reassess with our teams and partners how to prioritize activities in those countries, given shifts in the financial and political landscape. To explore how we could implement new approaches – such as area-based interventions – to support solutions for the internally displaced, refugees, and their hosts. In short, to plan strategically for 2023 and beyond.

We had just landed in Baghdad when the two earthquakes struck. As you can imagine, we quickly readjusted our focus. As did UNHCR teams on the ground in Turkiye and Syria. This was not – is not – a typical displacement emergency. The earthquakes did not distinguish between displaced or host communities. Between political factions. No one living near the epicenters was spared and we offer our sincere condolences to all those who were lost in the earthquakes. We lost 3 precious colleagues and 1 remains missing – along with both nations and other organizations who are working there to alleviate the suffering of others, UNHCR is grieving. Despite that grief, UNHCR mobilized immediately and contributed to the humanitarian relief effort, even before the magnitude of the damage was fully understood. Tents, blankets, health and sanitation support, whatever technical expertise we could redirect.

By the time I arrived in Aleppo a few days later, there was no mistaking the scale of the destruction. Collapsed buildings everywhere. Families with nowhere to go, living in the open, on small patches of grass or rubble in front of what remained of their homes. Wondering where they would spend the coming nights. Some, whose buildings had only partially collapsed, could still see the inside of their homes – a child's bed in the middle of a room, mirrors or pictures on a wall. As if frozen in time. As if a knife had sliced straight through the building.

I was struck by what I saw. How do you plan for the unknown? Where do these families find hope in the rubble? Many of them, in Syria, displaced multiple times over the last decade. How do we begin to find solutions to their displacement?

We begin by being there. On the ground. To protect. To provide life-saving aid. To work with the partners and governments and those affected themselves as they start to rebuild their lives. Your support enables us to be there, and we thank you for that.

Madam Vice Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

UNHCR must be able to respond to the unknown, and we have shown that we can. Last year alone, we responded to over 35 emergencies around the world, from Ukraine to Pakistan. This year already, in addition to the earthquakes, we have had emergency declarations for situations in Burkina Faso, Somalia, and the DRC, with large numbers of people seeking

safety in and around those countries. Adding to the more than 100 million forcibly displaced people in the world today.

I will not go into further detail on UNHCR operations around the world. The Assistant High Commissioner for Operations and the Regional Directors will provide a thorough overview of our operations globally, and how we aim to meet, year in year out, the enormous humanitarian needs of the people that UNHCR serves. And beyond responding, you will also hear about how UNHCR *prepares* for the unknown, how we monitor drivers of displacement, anticipate needs, and plan for emergencies.

I would just like to underline that this should not obscure the importance of delivering for what is *already known*. For the many protracted situations of displacement – in Bangladesh or Chad, and the list is long – that have become so familiar, that seem so deadlocked that they no longer attract interest or financial commitment. To underscore that whenever a window for solutions is open, whenever the smallest opportunity for peace is available – in Ethiopia or in Burundi – we must seize it and redouble our efforts to nurture the conditions that will allow refugees and other displaced persons to return to their homes.

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We also know, looking ahead at 2023, that UNHCR will reach major milestones in the modernization of our organization. This year will be a pivotal one in UNHCR's transformation, which began in 2017 with the launch of a broader reform process. Since then, UNHCR has reviewed and transformed its structure, through a decentralization and regionalization that brought us ever closer to the people we serve. That decision has been validated many times since, most strikingly in the context of the COVID pandemic – we were able to stay and deliver – but also as recently as last month and the response to the earthquakes. Thanks to a more modern and agile structure, regional directors were able to make decisions quickly, efficiently, with less bureaucracy to overcome. They were able to rely on specialized teams in the regional Bureaux, to call on local expertise, closer to the point of delivery. That meant that we were able to react to the initial needs within hours.

We are also modernizing our systems – with the Business Transformation Programme, or BTP. We have updated you on a regular basis on the progress of the BTP, including on the launch, in October last year, of the digital Human Resources system, Workday. More than 2 million successful transactions were carried out in Workday since it went live. And as we had anticipated, the convenience to connect from mobile devices has been a driver of Workday's use. In fact, more users now connect to Workday every day from their mobile devices than from their computers. We expect that, in time, as usage of the system matures and the size of our data grows, Workday will deliver greater insights on our workforce, and on our recruitment and employment practices.

In parallel to Workday, we have been preparing for the launch of our remaining systems, starting this summer with the new Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning system. As the name implies, Cloud ERP is a cloud-based tool that will provide a real-time view of finance and procurement activities, bringing greater clarity into the complex supply, logistical, and financial processes that underpin UNHCR's ability to respond. Cloud ERP will allow us, for example, to know how many tents are in stock, or in transit, or being procured at any point in time so that when the next emergency strikes we can react even more quickly and efficiently.

And following Cloud ERP, by the end of 2023, we aim to have rolled out all remaining BTP systems – PROMS for partner management; Synergy, to streamline our donor and external engagements; and Link, which will provide systems integration, and enhance our reporting and overall business intelligence capacity.

All in all, a rather eventful second half to the year to match operational challenges and opportunities. But one for which our experience with COMPASS and Workday has prepared us well. We have learned some important lessons on communicating and listening to those in operations around the world as new systems are launched, and we aim to be even better prepared.

Madam Vice Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

Modernizing UNHCR is about more than structure and systems. It is also about embracing change, even when change is difficult. It is about changing our mindset, refreshing and updating our organizational culture – but without losing our identity, or compromising our values. And despite our relentless focus on people management and building an inclusive and diverse organization, this third piece of UNHCR's transformation puzzle is perhaps the most challenging.

One critical aspect of transforming our culture is our unwavering commitment to strengthening UNHCR's integrity and oversight frameworks – as you will hear from the Inspector General under Agenda item 5 later this week. Third line oversight entities – including the IGO and Ethics – along with the Ombuds function – work together, and are supported by management, to bring greater coherence to our informal and formal integrity mechanisms. And we do not hesitate to use all the tools at our disposal when needed. Especially when misconduct occurs.

We have made absolutely clear that sexual misconduct has no place in the organization. Just last week, the High Commissioner issued his report to the organization on his Practice in Disciplinary Matters and Cases of Criminal Behavior. And this year again, every single case of misconduct in the organization involving sexual harassment, or sexual exploitation and abuse, led to termination of employment. UNHCR does not tolerate sexual misconduct. No matter our backgrounds, or our experience, or our abilities – and UNHCR is a large and diverse organization – we all share the same fundamental values and abide by the same principles.

Accountability to the people we serve is another value to which we are committed and in which we continue to invest. For the first time this year, through our Refugee-Led Innovation Fund, we have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in supporting projects conceived and led by forcibly displaced people themselves. UNHCR supports them – financially of course, but also with expertise and mentorship – to develop solutions to the challenges they and their communities face.

We are in constant conversation with displaced communities to explore, together, ways to strengthen their participation, in a meaningful manner, in the decisions that affect their lives. That can be through specific projects, as just highlighted, or through representation in regional and global events and processes to develop and endorse policy and practice. Including in the second Global Refugee Forum – UNHCR's flagship global event – scheduled to take place in December.

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The Global Refugee Forum marks 5 years since the adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees. The second Global Refugee Forum will be an opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved since 2018, when the UN General Assembly reaffirmed its collective commitment to finding sustainable solutions for refugees. It will follow a broader strategic review on the global state of displacement covering the last 10 years, which will be included in the High Commissioner's report to the General Assembly, and which we look forward to discussing with you in due course.

The Global Refugee Forum will also follow and complement other UN summits, including the SDG Summit planned in September, during the General Assembly high-level week. We share the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and of Our Common Agenda. Coherence and complementarity with the broader UN system is firmly embedded in our strategic vision.

UNHCR is at the forefront of UN-wide efficiency initiatives – including through UN Fleet, which provides for cost-efficient, energy-saving shared fleet and transport services. UNHCR actively reports on the UN development system reform implementation, through its annual contributions to the report of the Secretary General on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review, among other mechanisms. Through the UN Chief Executives Board, UNHCR leads on system-wide efforts to prevent and combat sexual misconduct.

Although we are a humanitarian agency, we partner strategically with a wide range of entities in the UN family, and across all UN pillars – peace and security, human rights, and development. We also partner with civil society organizations, with international financial institutions, with NGOs – predominantly local ones – with faith-based organizations, and increasingly with the private sector. These partnerships – over 1,100 of them – allow us to learn from best practices, and in turn provide us with flexibility and expertise when mobilizing a response.

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Distinguished delegates,

Flexibility of financial support to the organization is critical to our ability to save lives. When we can shift resources from one operation to another, from one region to another, it is often the difference between meeting a South Sudanese refugee family's needs or not. Between supporting reintegration activities for Burundi returnees or not. And so we appeal to you again for flexibility in your contributions as we aim to meet needs foreseen and unforeseen.

We were able to respond to so many emergencies in 2022 with your support, and increasingly with the support of the private sector. I would be remiss not to mention that 2022 was a record-breaking year for the support received from private sector partners – over \$1 billion USD and we take steps every day to see how we can find innovative ways to raise more resources. For example, in partnership with the Islamic Development Bank, we have just set up the Global Islamic Fund for Refugees to mobilize Islamic philanthropy, which has huge potential.

This funding, and more, is necessary to meet needs, which are enormous. Our budget for 2023 currently stands at \$10.6 billion dollars. We count on your continued generous support

to help us. Your support enables us to be there – for Ukrainians fleeing bombs, for Congolese seeking safety, and for the Syrian families waiting to restart their lives.

We thank you for your support.