

89th Meeting of the Standing Committee

March 2024

Statement by Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning/afternoon. This Committee meeting coincides with the start of my fifth year as UNHCR's Inspector General. As I reflect on 2023, I continue to believe in the crucial and powerful role that independent oversight, whether on integrity or assurance, and disproportionate to their size, has to help organisations improve. My Office's strategy is to make UNHCR's oversight system efficient and effective. This is in order to give the stakeholders of UNHCR, most especially the people we serve, confidence that UNHCR acts with integrity and makes the very best use of the resources entrusted to it, to achieve the most impact.

Delivery of mandate

My Office's mandate is just that – to ensure that the oversight system is greater than the sum of its specific and independent parts. As we approach the concluding phase of the IGO's strategy 2021-2026, I am pleased to confirm that both sides of the oversight system, integrity and assurance are working well and, with legitimate and healthy dynamic tensions, collectively. My Office continued to support improvements and best practice in oversight in 2023, with a range of direct work and facilitative projects. For example, work to improve the handling of Protection Against Retaliation processes in concert with the Ethics Office; work to review the provision of the Speak Up Helpline; and a qualitative, longitudinal review of IGO data on sexual harassment cases.

On coordination, my Office continues, through a range of activities, to ensure a collective and aligned conversation amongst the assurance providers and amongst the integrity providers. This whole-of-system

approach, whilst recognising the mandates and roles of individual entities, is crucial for overall effectiveness and efficiency. This approach enables collaboration, for example in coordinating the oversight entities' workplans to ensure appropriate assurance coverage and to avoid gaps and overlaps; or in the undertaking a collective review of integrity entities' data, to inform system level improvements.

On capacity building, my Office has continued to drive its own efficiency, through use of artificial intelligence and remote digital forensic tools for our investigations work and qualitative data analysis tools to gather insight from oversight work. We have also continued to enhance the capacity of others, with training to UNHCR staff and implementing partners on addressing fraud and sexual misconduct, reaching nearly 3,000 people worldwide. Also, for the first time, leading training for investigators across the UN-system with the aim to bring coherence and exchange best practices.

On learning, my Office continues to provide a range of products to support UNHCR's management team, including 41 management implication reports issued last year to learn lessons from my Office's investigations. The Strategic Oversight team has delivered a range of analysis and advice pieces, in support of UNHCR's senior management team, on key strategic risk areas during 2023, for example root cause analysis of persistent oversight findings.

Themes from 2023

Your excellencies, reflecting on 2023, it has been a challenging year for UNHCR in terms of increasing demand for its services and resource constraints. It has also been a year where UNHCR has made significant organisational progress and these two themes are reflected in the work of oversight. I want to draw out five observations:

First, transparent stakeholder reporting, giving confidence in the work of UNHCR, has been a priority for oversight providers, and my Office has supported a range of formal and informal briefings to member states in 2023. My Office has also supported a range of donor-specific enquiries, including the MOPAN. I

remain fully committed to transparency and will report, from a position independent of UNHCR's management, issues and risks you need to know. I continue to have an open door for member states for any concerns or questions you wish to raise with me. Your continued trust in, reliance on, and use of, the work done by the oversight providers is essential to minimise costs and to maximise trust.

Secondly, there is a golden thread of linked actions nested under UNHCR's business transformation programme. Specifically, a coherent programme of modernised corporate IT systems; enabling better use of data for management and oversight; supporting capacity to meaningfully regionalise and decentralise; accompanied with headquarters rationalisation; and all underpinned by improved risk management maturity should lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness of UNHCR. The platform for change is now in place, and I observe the real challenge starts in 2024 to bring the strands of transformation together and actualise the intended benefits.

Third, as at the end of 2023, UNHCR's control frameworks (that is the disposition of activities designed to achieve UNHCR's policy objectives consistently and fully) for the new systems and structures are still not comprehensively in place and fully functional. There is, still, variability in the performance of UNHCR's control frameworks, leading in turn to some unreliable risk management outcomes which are identified in oversight reports. A key component requiring further attention is to deliver on improved second line oversight from HQ and especially the Bureaux.

Fourth, UNHCR, as a mandate-led organisation, places high reliance on cultural norms of its staff and partner organisations to ensure integrity and ethical standards are delivered. My Office saw a 29% increase in the number of misconduct complaints it registered in 2023 compared to 2022. Similarly, other UNHCR integrity entities and across the UN system also saw an increase. Whilst this may reflect increased confidence in the systems of complaint and response, it also could suggest an increase in the underlying challenge.

Finally, within the overall increase, there is still variability in levels and rates of integrity issue reporting, with an unintuitive and uneven distribution of misconduct complaints (including many 'cold spots') across UNHCR's operations globally.

All of my observations are areas of collective focus for UNHCR management and my office in 2024, for example, we have a collective view and plan of oversight of the business transformation programme out to 2026. My Office will also take further steps enhance our efficiency and effectiveness during 2024, as the opening of the year suggests a further increase in demand.

Conclusion

2023 has been a year during which the demand on UNHCR and on its independent oversight system, both integrity and assurance, have increased significantly. The various entities and services have largely stepped up in quality and quantity, and a whole of system approach to integrity and assurance has been adopted. The third line functions have worked well, and increasingly so, with UNHCR first- and second-line management. Nevertheless, the oversight system, and UNHCR, are under extreme pressure, and there is, therefore, a need for UNHCR's logical and sensible reforms under the business transformation programme to bear real fruit in 2024, most specifically through enhanced second line management oversight.

Thank you.

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