

74th Session of the Executive Committee

October 2023

Speech, Inspector General's Office

Mr. Anthony Garnett, Inspector General

Chairperson,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning / afternoon.

My Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/74/8) covers the work of my office in the year to June 2023. It provides the key activities and statistics for the IGO's work during the period.

I want, through my comments today, to draw out some key points and themes from the IGO's work and to add some observations that I hope will be useful.

IGO strategy

Your excellencies, I want to frame my comments within the context of the IGO's five-year strategy 2021-2026. This remains unchanged: its core aim is to ensure that 'UNHCR has an effective independent oversight system giving confidence to UNHCR's stakeholders over UNHCR's efficiency, economy and effectiveness'. This is crucial, as demand on UNHCR's limited resources is ever increasing, stretching those resources further. UNHCR's oversight system is there not only to ensure that UNHCR is efficient and effective, but also to be fit for purpose in and of itself; and focused on things that have real impact. My report sets out the coherent set of actions taken by the IGO to deliver on this strategic aim.

I look back on this last year and consider that good progress has been made on both the assurance and integrity oversight systems. Both have the various independent entities and actors working harmoniously.

When my predecessor supported the development of UNHCR's *Policy on Independent Oversight* in 2019, it was designed to make sense of the complex independent oversight landscape of UNHCR, and to place the IGO at the centre of it, with a mandate and role to ensure its coherence. This was a prescient

move, as UNHCR's stakeholders have rightly demanded greater accountability and transparency from UNHCR, whilst at the same time UNHCR's work has become both larger in scale, and increasingly complex. UNHCR's stakeholders cannot and should not accept that oversight entities don't work together and don't make best use of the resources entrusted to them.

At that time, a new function of the IGO, Strategic Oversight, was created. It was intended to do just that, to bring a strategic focus to oversight work. It has been ably supported by my Office's investigations function to ensure the same rigour across both the assurance and integrity oversight systems. In addition to its coordination and policy work, Strategic Oversight is also an assurance provider in its own right, providing a range of risk based, strategic, advisory work for the attention of UNHCR's senior management team. I also continue to retain the mandate for formal inspections, which I will use as appropriate.

Other system-wide considerations

Distinguished delegates, you consistently raise two recurring system-wide themes in relation to oversight. First, independence. In this case independence from executive management. Given the terms of my appointment and the safeguards built in, I can assure you that my Office's work is undertaken without fear or favour. I also monitor all of the integrity and assurance providers to ensure that their ability to work is not impaired. The second theme is resourcing. In the current times of difficult choices around funding, oversight is not, nor should it be, immune. I am grateful, however, that UNHCR's executive management has stayed the course on integrity and oversight matters and that resourcing, whilst challenging, has not been significantly scaled back. I would like to express my thanks for the High Commissioner's and Deputy High Commissioner's unwavering support and continued commitment to a stable independent oversight and integrity system.

Assurance

I want to turn now to implementation of the assurance component of my Office's work. My Office continued its core work to provide the Secretariat for UNHCR's Independent Audit and Oversight

Committee; being the focal point in UNHCR for the OIOS-provided internal audit service and the Joint Inspection Unit; and ensuring oversight delivery and coordination.

At a systems level, the assurance entities functioned adequately during the year. As Inspector General, I welcome and support each of the assurance providers, working as they do with differing mandates and professions. The workplans for both the Joint Inspection Unit and OIOS-provided internal audit have been challenging for them to complete during 2023, and I welcome a full return of both in the coming year.

My Office's Strategic Oversight function has released a number of assurance products for the consideration of management, providing risk-based analysis of key risks. Foundational work, mapping assurance to UNHCR's risk map, and root cause analysis of procurement and related themes, has been undertaken. Work, tackling key areas of risk for UNHCR on the headquarters realignment and strategic advice on the oversight system itself have also been provided, including for the refresh of UNHCR's internal audit arrangements.

Work to coordinate the next phase of oversight activity on the systems rolled out under the Business Transformation Programme is underway, to support UNHCR's management to ensure maximum benefit is obtained from the investments made.

Investigations

Your excellencies, turning to the integrity system, my Office has continued to be the heart of the system, and to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the various integrity entities, with their independent mandates.

Changes made last year, including those related to the protection against retaliation process; the routing of the Speak Up Helpline, and Support Desk have now embedded, and relevant entities have settled into operating in concert. I take this opportunity to thank Ann Encontre, the outgoing Director of Ethics, for her support and close working to make these operational, but substantive, changes come to fruition.

The data in my report for the last year paint a clear picture of increasing demand on my Office and our investigations work. This, around 25% increase year-on-year, means that UNHCR likely continues to be, by some measure, dealing with the greatest numbers of complaints, and sexual misconduct complaints in particular, across the UN system, even accounting for the fact that published data are not easily comparable. My Office expects to receive 90,000 items of correspondence in the calendar year 2023, with a predicted total of 2,150, in-mandate, complaints. We also refer around a further 570 complaints to UNHCR management, ensuring they are actively picked up. We do not register out of mandate matters.

Steps taken in the year to recalibrate our intake judgements, such as routing items better addressed by management or another entity for action, have taken effect. To address the ongoing and predicted demand, my Office will strengthen its complaints intake capacity through: enhanced team leadership; analysis of trends in data; improved business processes; part-automation of intake processes (eventually using artificial intelligence); and more active referral and tracking of matters to UNHCR partners. It is important to note, I do not intend to reduce or dilute the thresholds of intake judgements, but rather ensure efficiency gains in our intake processes, in response to the increasing demand.

Sexual misconduct complaints remain my Office's top priority, at both the intake and investigation stages of our work, and to ensure a victim centred approach throughout the process. Sexual exploitation and abuse complaints continue on an upwards trend, with a majority of cases reported relating to UNHCR's partners (82%), as seen in previous years. Sexual harassment complaints remain steady with a majority relating to UNHCR staff (58%).

Moving from response to prevention. Whilst this primary responsibility lays with executive management, my Office has taken a number of steps to help prevent fraud and misconduct. We continued our capacity building on investigations, with a range of workshops for both UNHCR and partner staff, including on sexual misconduct and fraud. On fraud, my Office continues to enhance our forensic capacity to ensure we don't just enable the sanctioning of staff involved, but have improved capacity to quantify losses and provide a basis to refer to other parties for recovery. We have also undertaken proactive work, working with other UN and member state investigations functions to

identify duplicate claims for payment from partners. This ‘double dipping’ work is ongoing and has identified some significant, actionable, findings.

Finally, the most effective prevention method is to ensure organisational learning from misconduct events. We have issued 41 management implication reports, which are short memoranda, targeted at executive management, to ensure improvements to controls and systems that we identify as being ineffective from our investigations casework.

Efficiency

Your excellencies, I continue to hear the call for greater efficiency and effectiveness of oversight. As Inspector General I take a whole-of-system view of assurance and integrity provision in UNHCR, to ensure that the balance of capacities and tools available and deployed is optimal. My Office has a number of projects we are supporting or leading, whether it is the careful and judicious use of artificial intelligence in oversight work, data analysis and review, or policy advice and changes. All have been designed to do more with less, efficiently and effectively. I encourage member states to engage with the oversight community and welcome continued dialogue outside of this formal meeting.

Conclusion

In closing, *Distinguished Delegates*, please accept my continued thanks for your support and engagement in my Office’s work and in my strategic mission to modernise and reform UNHCR’s oversight and integrity systems for the benefit of those whom UNHCR serves.