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Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-second session

Summary record of the 655th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 6 October 2011, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Knutsson (Vice-Chairperson).....(Sweden)

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In the absence of Mr. Badr (Egypt), Mr. Knutsson (Sweden), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Consideration and adoption of the Biennial Programme Budget 2012–2013 (*continued*)
(A/AC.96/1100, A/AC.96/1100/Corr.1 and A/AC.96/1100/Add.1)

1. **Mr. Laassel** (Morocco) said that the new budget structure facilitated forecasting and yielded a clearer picture of the budget programme. As for staffing expenditures, he noted that the number of staff members in between assignments had shrunk slightly in 2010 and the first half of 2011, while the number of those with temporary contracts had fallen in 2010 and risen slightly in 2011. He understood that, given the nature of the work of UNHCR, it was difficult to manage those categories of staff, and he noted with appreciation the organization's efforts to use resources efficiently. He encouraged UNHCR to continue with results-based management and to do more to resolve the issue of staff in between assignments.
2. He noted that the amount allocated for assistance to the Middle East and North Africa region, which was experiencing massive refugee flows, would be reduced by more than US\$ 8 million in 2012. It was difficult to understand the reasons for the reduction, given the uncertain political situation in the region. He asked the secretariat to provide an explanation to the Executive Committee.
3. **Ms. Furuya** (Japan) said that her country had increased its contributions to UNHCR from year to year and would maintain its humanitarian assistance policy despite the disaster it had recently suffered. She expressed gratitude to the international community for its support in connection with the disaster.
4. The contributions of Japan to UNHCR to date in 2011 totalled approximately US\$ 226 million, surpassing the 2010 figure of US\$ 143 million, which had been considered an all-time high. Japan had provided emergency assistance for those displaced owing to the armed conflict in Libya, for refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya and for those affected by recent flooding in Pakistan. Japan was considering providing additional support via the supplementary budget mechanism in order to help close the UNHCR funding gap. She expressed concern that there was already a US\$ 1.6 billion funding gap for 2011 and urged UNHCR to enlarge its donor base, including through appeals to the private sector, and to enhance the cost-effectiveness of its operations.
5. As the security situation worsened and humanitarian space continued to shrink, it was crucial to strengthen capacity-building for security management. In that connection, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency and the UNHCR eCentre in Tokyo had recently co-sponsored safety-in-the-field training for representatives of Governments, international organizations and NGOs.
6. **Ms. Clifford** (Sweden) said that the shift to budgeting based on the Global Needs Assessment had helped provide a clearer picture of funding requirements and the consequences of an underfunded budget. While it was unrealistic to expect the higher budget requirements identified to be fully funded in the coming years, the needs-based approach would be useful for advocacy and for setting priorities. In fact, it should ultimately result in higher funding levels.
7. Her country would contribute substantially to the 2012–2013 budget. The State's core contribution for 2012 would be 613 million Swedish krona, which would be almost entirely unearmarked. In that connection, she echoed the request made earlier by the United States representative that earmarked donations and demands for tailored and specific reporting should be kept to a minimum.

8. **Mr. Aleinikoff** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the points raised during the previous and current meetings, said that it was important to distinguish between the 2011 budget initially approved by the Executive Committee, the current status of that budget and the budget for 2012. The latter was approximately US\$ 100 million higher than the initial 2011 budget. The current 2011 budget included supplementary amounts for emergencies that had arisen during the year. He agreed that the 2012 budget was not sufficient to meet Africa's core needs and that, as the representative of Sweden had said, the purpose of the Global Needs Assessment had been to ascertain the real needs and the funding gap.

9. He commended the representative of the United States for having stressed the importance of adhering to good humanitarian donorship principles, and said he agreed that priority should be given to funding the needs of women and children. In fact, the theme of women and education was among those on which UNHCR would focus its efforts to raise funds from the private sector.

10. He noted with appreciation the support voiced by the representative of Morocco for the budgeting approach and for the global strategic priorities selected and wished to inform him that UNHCR was working on a draft policy that should make it possible to further reduce the number of staff in between assignments. With regard to the reduction in assistance to the Middle East and North Africa region, he wished to confirm that the amounts approved by the Executive Committee for the region for 2011 totalled US\$ 552 million, while those proposed for 2012 amounted to US\$ 565 million.

11. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan for its continued support to UNHCR, as evidenced in its response to the refugee crisis in the Horn of Africa and the recent flooding in Pakistan and its ongoing support to Afghan refugees. He agreed that UNHCR needed to enlarge its donor base in order to close its funding gap.

12. He agreed with the representative of Sweden that the Global Needs Assessment was an important advocacy tool. That country's declared intention to maintain its high level of support to UNHCR in 2012 was welcome, as was the fact that most of the funding that it would provide would not be earmarked.

13. He expressed appreciation to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its support in preventing conflict in the North African region, for its financial support to UNHCR in 2011, and for promoting adherence to the ECOWAS Protocol relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, which had advanced the search for durable solutions, including local integration strategies.

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters

14. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters. If the Committee adopted the draft decision, it would approve the total revised budget requirements for 2011, amounting to US\$ 3,780.5 million, and the total biennial programme budget requirements for 2012–2013, amounting to US\$ 3,591.2 million for 2012 and US\$ 3,418.6 million for 2013. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft decision.

15. *It was so decided.*

16. *A film on UNHCR emergency response and supply chain management was shown.*

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

17. **Ms. Bartolomei** (Rapporteur for the Annual Consultations with NGOs), introducing the report on the 2011 annual consultations with NGOs, said that the theme "60 years of partnership – the road ahead" had been chosen to highlight the critical role of partnerships

with NGOs in UNHCR activities and responses to crisis situations. The consultations had provided an important and timely opportunity to review progress, share good practices and explore new and urgent challenges. The issues discussed included the diminishing humanitarian and asylum space, displacement caused by environmental factors, the protection needs of urban refugees, women and girls at risk, and, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex asylum-seekers and refugees, and statelessness and internal displacement.

18. Concerns had been raised about specific regional policies, including: the planned invocation of the cessation clause for Rwandan refugees; the proposal by Australia to send asylum-seekers to Malaysia, a non-signatory State; and the situations in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile following the accession to independence of South Sudan. UNHCR had been urged to ensure that those concerns were addressed through dialogue, the delivery of assistance to civilians in need of protection and strengthened assistance for the Middle East and North Africa region.

19. During the consultations, a number of refugee and internally displaced women had spoken frankly about their experiences as victims of gender-related violence and had urged States to take action to prevent such violence. The participants had adopted recommendations calling for: properly-resourced and comprehensive services for victims of rape and other forms of gender-related violence in all refugee sites; the creation of a position similar to that of a special rapporteur to monitor both incidents of sexual- and gender-based violence and the measures taken to prevent such occurrences; the creation of a real protection space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex refugees and asylum-seekers; and the expansion of partnerships with civil society organizations working on the issue of statelessness. The importance of increased support for local and national partners through measures such as multi-year funding and the streamlining of reporting procedures had also been highlighted. NGOs had urged States to: explore and implement alternative measures to detention of refugees and asylum-seekers; continue to support UNHCR in its work; and work with UNHCR and NGOs to seek solutions for those displaced by natural disasters and to address protection gaps for refugee women and girls.

20. **Ms. Lascurain** (Rapporteur) said that the fact that nearly 200 international and national organizations and approximately 400 delegates, including members of the Executive Committee, had attended the annual consultations attested to the growing partnerships between States, NGOs and UNHCR. The report on the consultations and the key recommendations set out therein were the outcome of detailed discussions on a wide range of issues which had shown that NGOs and the members of the Executive Committee often shared the same concerns. She would welcome comments from members on how the results of the consultations could feed into the discussions of the Executive Committee.

21. **Mr. Beck** (Germany) said that partnership between all humanitarian actors was a cornerstone of humanitarian reform and that collaboration with local NGOs was needed to address refugees' particular needs and concerns and involve beneficiaries in the development and implementation of humanitarian aid measures. Local NGOs were often the only organizations permitted access to those in need of aid and were best placed to promote understanding of the nature and goals of humanitarian aid among political leaders and communities. Germany favoured partnerships with a diverse group of humanitarian actors to help address needs in different kinds of humanitarian crisis. He urged UNHCR to continue its partnerships with NGOs and other actors.

22. **Ms. Keogh** (Ireland) urged UNHCR to increase its capacity to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and welcomed the participation of women refugees and internally-displaced persons in the annual consultations. An effective coordination mechanism was needed for the prevention of gender-based violence and should allow collaboration with other sectoral clusters. The report contained useful recommendations on

age, gender and diversity mainstreaming; a key challenge would be to establish the role of UN Women in continuing the progress already made by UNHCR on gender issues.

23. Refugees should be consulted and involved in assessments of their needs and in the decision-making process. Her country welcomed the urgent call in the report for the creation of a real protection space for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender refugees and asylum-seekers and the recommendations on urban refugees. Further information on UNHCR work with partners to assist urban refugees would be useful.

24. The results-based management framework was a useful tool, as it gave clearer details on targets. Ireland welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to simplify some of its systems in response to feedback from NGO partners. By continuing to work together, UNHCR, NGOs and other humanitarian actors would be able to address similar challenges more effectively and deliver more timely and comprehensive assistance to those in need.

25. **Mr. Adam** (Australia), noting that the report on the annual consultations contained a number of criticisms of members, including Australia, said that open dialogue was essential and States should seek to understand the reasons behind such criticisms, regardless of whether or not they agreed with them. In that way, they could ensure that their policies and approaches were the right ones. His country enjoyed constructive collaboration with NGOs on refugee issues, despite disagreements in some policy areas. He commended UNHCR and the NGO community for their efforts to involve refugees in discussions.

26. He encouraged UNHCR to increase the number of headquarters and field posts for specialists in gender issues and sexual- and gender-based violence and expressed support for ongoing monitoring of protection responses and for the proposal on the establishment of a position similar to that of a special rapporteur to monitor activities. Lastly, he encouraged the Executive Committee to include the particular protection needs of women and girls as a permanent agenda item for consideration by the standing committees.

27. **Mr. Moeling** (United States of America) said that he fully supported regular coordination and interaction between UNHCR and NGOs on protection, assistance and durable solutions. He welcomed the focus on, and recommendations for addressing, local capacity-building; age, gender and diversity mainstreaming; sexual- and gender-based violence; and the needs of urban refugees. Updates on the results of strategies to address those important issues would be useful.

28. The United States welcomed the report's acknowledgement of the important role of partnerships with NGOs in supporting UNHCR activities to prevent and reduce statelessness. NGOs could provide crucial assistance in activities such as population mapping, birth registration and the protection of stateless children. His Government looked forward to seeing more UNHCR partnerships with NGOs in country operations.

29. **Mr. Al-Adoofi** (Yemen) said that the report covered a very wide range of issues of primordial importance for UNHCR and also for Yemen. There was an extensive humanitarian community on the ground in Yemen and NGOs played an important role in assisting refugees and displaced persons.

30. The ministerial-level conference to be held in Geneva in December 2011 was an important opportunity to secure pledges on capacity-building assistance for States and assistance to NGOs working in the field. NGOs played an essential role in many sectors and it was important to strengthen and increase their capacities.

31. **The Chairperson** expressed appreciation for the work of the NGOs that served as operational and implementing partners for UNHCR. The NGOs provided vital support for the fulfilment of the organization's mandate. He also stressed the importance of NGO contributions to the deliberations of the Executive Committee.

Other statements

32. **Mr. Wak-Woya** (Chairperson of the Staff Council of UNHCR) said that more than one third of UNHCR staff worked in hardship locations and conflict zones. Some were exposed to serious danger because the host Government concerned was unwilling or unable to provide adequate security. As a result, UNHCR was obliged to pay for private security arrangements that were costly and not always reliable. He therefore urged members to provide adequate protection for UNHCR staff in conflict zones.

33. Staff needed incentives to operate in hardship locations, but current practice was unsatisfactory. Staff were generally housed in poor quality accommodation for which they had to pay exorbitant amounts in rent. Moreover, the International Civil Service Commission had recently decided to reduce the special operational living allowance rate paid in most locations and decrease the frequency of rest and recuperation periods.

34. He welcomed the progress made on gender and geographical diversity within the Executive Committee but regretted the continued resistance to ensuring diversity in some UNHCR bureaux and divisions. Of 424 staff members recruited between 2005 and 2009, more than 70 per cent came from North America and Europe. Similarly, around 80 per cent of consultants at headquarters and in the field were also from North America and Europe. Seven members of the Executive Committee did not have a single staff member in the organization. It was important to avoid the perception that some key divisions and bureaux were Western outfits. He urged the High Commissioner to address the imbalance promptly, bearing in mind Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, on the principles of geographical diversity.

35. He praised the High Commissioner for his approach to geographical diversity in the appointment of senior managers, although there was room for improvement with regard to gender diversity. Gender parity had been achieved at very junior levels but a disappointing imbalance remained in the middle and senior ranks. Those involved in the staff selection process appeared not to have understood the objectives of UNHCR gender policy, which called for preferential treatment for female applicants with equal qualifications to those of their male counterparts.

36. He said that the growing practice in UNHCR of recruiting external staff and consultants, even to carry out core mandate protection functions, was demoralizing and insulting for internal staff left at home to do nothing on full pay (staff in between assignments, or SIBA). Such external personnel were being recruited in unprecedented numbers, which was seriously undermining the organization's esprit de corps.

37. The recruitment process for external temporary appointments lacked transparency. Of the current external recruits, nearly 80 per cent had been hand-picked by managers in violation of United Nations and UNHCR rules and policy on recruitment. The practice was exacerbating the SIBA problem.

38. The increasing tendency to hire consultants had become a problem throughout the United Nations and had prompted the General Assembly to pass a resolution (A/RES/65/247), in which it asked the Secretary-General to make the greatest possible use of in-house capacity. All too often, UNHCR staff members trained and taught external staff and consultants, for whom temporary posts were subsequently created while internal staff were sent home. On occasion, they were then called upon to rectify the work done by external appointees in posts for which they themselves had not been considered.

39. With regard to downsizing of UNHCR operations, the Staff Council had urged the High Commissioner to retain locally recruited general service staff and reduce the number of posts for internationally recruited professional staff, which would have the advantage of cutting costs and preserving the years of local experience accumulated by general service

staff members. As many of them as possible should therefore be retained in Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and Georgia, where UNHCR planned to reduce its operations. Moreover, the freeze in place since 2009 on the recruitment of general service staff to professional posts was unfair and should be lifted.

40. The Staff Council had made several recommendations on how to solve the ongoing SIBA issue, including the mandatory matching of such staff members with available posts, the suspension of those parts of the resource allocation framework concerning the authority of managers to cut posts, and the transfer of the administration of staff costs to a centre managed by headquarters.

41. The Staff Council was disappointed that, although some 900 long-serving staff had finally been awarded indefinite contracts, those contracts were, in essence, for a fixed-term and thus did not provide the job security enjoyed by permanent staff throughout the rest of the United Nations system.

42. **Ms. Keah** (Kenya) said that her delegation would be interested to know what steps had been taken to improve geographical diversity in certain divisions of UNHCR, particularly in the Geneva and Budapest offices of the Division of Human Resources Management, the Division of Emergency Security and Supply and the executive offices of the High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner. The delegation would also like to know what had been done to address the lack of equitable geographical distribution among staff in the office of the Ombudsman.

43. **Mr. Aleinikoff** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR was working to improve staff diversity, which would be achieved in the long term through the recruitment process. The Joint Advisory Committee, made up of staff and managers, was studying a proposal to switch from individual recruitment for particular posts to a system of worldwide recruitment of an annual intake of from 40 to 60 new staff members who would be trained for careers in UNHCR. Such a process would facilitate a balanced geographical and gender-based approach to recruitment for international professional posts. Another way to enhance geographical diversity was through the conversion of general service staff, most of whom were recruited in the developing countries in which UNHCR operated, to professional level positions. Diversity was a key factor in the selection of staff for senior management posts.

44. **The Chairperson** praised the courage and dedication of UNHCR staff, without whom the work of the Executive Committee could not be carried out. The Committee relied on the Staff Council to keep it informed of issues of concern.

Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2012

Draft decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2012

Draft decision on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2011–2012

Consideration of the provisional agenda of the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee

Draft decision on the provisional agenda of the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee

45. **The Chairperson** drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the draft decisions on the programme of work of the Standing Committee for 2012, on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2011–2012 and on the draft

provisional agenda of the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee. He said that requests had been submitted by Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Honduras, Iraq, Malaysia, Nepal and Slovakia for observer status before the Executive Committee, which he proposed to insert into the agreed text of the draft decision on observer participation. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt those decisions, which would be included in the report of the Executive Committee on the work of the current session.

46. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.