



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixty-fifth session

### Summary record of the 678th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 30 September 2014, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Choi Seokyoung .....(Republic of Korea)

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

1. *A short film entitled "The Nation of the Displaced" was projected.*

**Statement by the High Commissioner and general debate**

2. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) said that global forced displacement had been rising steadily in recent years, with over 51 million people displaced due to conflict or persecution. New conflicts in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ukraine and Iraq, along with drawn-out emergencies in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Somalia, required significant international attention, stretching the limits of humanitarian capacity. The magnitude of the Syrian conflict had profoundly impacted neighbouring countries and refugees were becoming increasingly vulnerable as host communities' finite resources dwindled. The spillover into Iraq of the fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic had magnified the dramatic regional impact of the conflict, driving large numbers of asylum seekers' across the borders into Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The situation in Ukraine had caused thousands of people to flee their homes, and Africa faced a number of major displacement crises.

3. The response to five system-wide Level 3 emergencies in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Philippines, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Iraq over the previous year had placed an unprecedented strain on UNHCR resources. More than 670 emergency deployments of UNHCR and partner staff had been made since 2013, and 400 international emergency fast track posts had been advertised in order to ensure continuity beyond the immediate emergency response. UNHCR had also introduced a new recruitment policy, including the Entry Level Humanitarian Professional Programme and the Capacity Building Initiative, in an attempt to streamline the assignment process and safeguard against recruitment gaps. Ensuring staff security, well-being and development was essential to the Agency's ability to operate and would therefore remain a key priority in the future.

4. In the face of such enormous pressures, UNHCR would continue to rely on the support of host countries and communities, donors, and partners in its efforts to protect refugees and provide humanitarian assistance. Nine out of ten refugees lived in developing countries – up from 70 per cent 10 years earlier. It was crucial, therefore, for host States in the developing world to benefit from increased international solidarity and burden-sharing. Voluntary contributions to UNHCR had reached a record US\$ 2.9 billion in 2013 and donors should rest assured that UNHCR would continue striving to maximize the impact of their funding, inter alia by ensuring better oversight and accountability. Closer partnerships were being forged with United Nations agencies such as the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, faith-based entities and other development actors in order to ensure complementary in humanitarian delivery. UNHCR remained firmly committed to the implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative agenda and had launched the Refugee Coordination Model at the end of 2013 in order to provide a straightforward, systematic and inclusive reference point for host governments and partners.

5. Numerous measures had been taken to address the issues of statelessness, protection at sea, protection of women and children and internal displacement. UNHCR would be launching a global campaign to end statelessness in November 2014 and intended to raise the issue of protection in relation to irregular maritime movements during the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2014. A holistic approach was being taken to child protection, education and sexual and gender-based violence prevention, and significant progress had made in implementing the global strategy on sexual and gender-based violence. Internal displacement, which stood at over 33 million

persons worldwide, required greater international attention and UNHCR had reviewed its policy on the subject so as to provide improved guidance to staff and partners.

6. Finding durable solutions to the surge in displacement rates remained the most challenging aspect of the Agency's mandate. UNHCR had established 19 operations worldwide with non-earmarked funding as part of the Transitional Solutions Initiative and had increased its budget for the Global Strategy for Livelihoods by more than 40 per cent over the previous three years. Comprehensive initiatives, such as the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees in South-West Asia, and the solutions initiative for Colombian refugees in Ecuador, had the best chance of success in dealing with the refugee crisis. The establishment of the Solutions Alliance between governments, humanitarian and development organizations, and civil society was a further encouraging step towards more innovative approaches.

7. The international humanitarian community must adapt to changing global realities and innovation would play an important role in ensuring a global response to modern-day humanitarian crises. For example, UNHCR had provided more than US\$ 220 million in cash assistance to strengthen refugee self-reliance around the world and had issued a policy on alternatives to camps, which extended the principal objectives of its urban refugee policy to all operational contexts. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 would be the ideal platform for detailed discussion of the current global humanitarian challenges.

8. The lack of an effective governance system and unclear international power relations had eroded the international community's capacity to prevent and resolve conflict, and population growth, urbanization, poverty, food insecurity, water scarcity and climate change would continue to place an enormous strain on humanitarian resources. UNCHR intended to make structural improvements to the existing humanitarian funding system and establish partnerships with emerging donors and the private sector in order to expand the available resource base. A fundamental review was needed of the relationship between humanitarian and development funding. Humanitarian actors currently had access to only a fraction of the resources available to development partners and donors, and it was the latter, therefore, that should engage earlier in the response to emerging crises in order to bridge the gap between short- and longer-term interventions. Funding difficulties notwithstanding, the fundamental challenge to humanitarian response remained conflict prevention and resolution, and international political resolve would need to be strengthened in order to address the root causes of displacement.

9. **Mr. Porter** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, commended UNHCR on its continued engagement with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and welcomed the Committee's statement on the centrality of protection in humanitarian settings. The UNHCR 2012–2016 Education Strategy represented an important step towards achieving durable protection solutions for children of concern, but stronger coordination with development actors, particularly national governments, would be required in order to improve and ensure access to education for all children.

10. Durable solutions for displaced persons and returnees must be addressed under development strategies and would require closer cooperation between humanitarian, protection and development stakeholders from the outset of a crisis. The European Union (EU) had included the development and integration needs of forcibly displaced persons and returnees, as well as host communities, in its humanitarian policies and urged the international humanitarian community to do the same.

11. In solidarity with the peoples and countries affected by humanitarian crises, the European Union and its member States continued to provide support to internally displaced

persons and hosted a significant number of refugees. It was therefore extremely concerned at the increasingly perilous situation of persons fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the sharp rise in the number of asylum applicants in the European Union, representing some 40 per cent of the world's asylum applicants in 2013. The European Union had identified several refugee initiatives that could be pursued in close cooperation with UNHCR and interested third countries.

12. Out of concern to uphold the standards of the Common European Asylum System, the European Union had increased its assistance to refugee-hosting and transit countries under regional development and protection programmes, including a new programme targeting Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. It had also provided financial incentives to EU member States under its European Union Resettlement Programme in order to improve resettlement prospects for refugees, and had recently pledged to admit an unprecedented number of persons in need of protection, including Syrian refugees.

13. **Ms. Iivula-Ithana** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the African Group, expressed support for the statement made by the High Commissioner for Refugees and paid tribute to UNHCR staff working in difficult and dangerous situations worldwide. Despite the great burden placed on national economies and development, many African countries had taken steps to enable refugees to live and work in urban areas and have access to education. However, the current level of funding for UNHCR activities in the African region covered less than 50 per cent of the requirements. The funding gap had resulted in a significant reduction in the scope and quality of assistance provided to refugees and had further stretched host countries' limited resources. She therefore urged UNHCR to consider allocating more non-earmarked funds to the African region under its Biennial Programme Budget 2014–2015.

14. The pursuit of durable solutions to protracted refugee crises in Africa must take account of the principle of burden and responsibility sharing. Voluntary repatriation should be promoted as the preferred solution and must go beyond the initial process of reintegration. She expressed support for the Agency's ongoing cooperation with implementing partners and welcomed its strengthened coordination with a number of non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and other key partners.

15. **Mr. Aguirre Martínez** (Observer for Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), said that it was important to provide adequate protection to the victims of humanitarian crises and prevent them falling prey to human trafficking or sexual exploitation. States, international organizations and civil society actors should join forces to achieve that objective, and adequate financial resources were required to build the capacity of host communities. Paraguay welcomed the UNHCR initiative to address forced displacement in Central America and Mexico and its special focus on protecting children by addressing the often highly dangerous conditions faced by child migrants from the Northern Triangle of Central America to the United States of America.

16. A ministerial meeting would be held in Brasilia in early December 2014 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. The participants in that meeting would adopt a declaration and plan of action which would serve as a road map for action to address humanitarian crises in the region. The declaration and the plan of action had been the subject of four subregional consultations with governments, NGOs, ombudsmen and international organizations dealing with refugee issues.

17. Sixteen Latin American and Caribbean States, including Paraguay, were now parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 11 were parties to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and 10 had ratified both Conventions. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean remained committed to working with UNHCR.

18. **Ms. Richard** (United States of America) said that the scale, complexity and urgency of the humanitarian crises faced by the international community were unprecedented. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continued while the resources of the countries hosting more than 3 million Syrian refugees were being stretched thin. Moreover, the unfettered savagery of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant was jeopardizing the gains made in democratic Iraq, and conflict and ethnic violence had returned to South Sudan. Despite its limited human resources, UNHCR had played a central role in confronting those crises.

19. In order to improve the responsiveness of its humanitarian operations, the international community needed to eliminate its excessive reliance on reactive disaster response. Development actors should focus on building resilient societies better able to withstand calamities and resolve protracted crises. The United States was providing both development and humanitarian assistance to countries such as Lebanon and Jordan to help them manage the strain of hosting refugees.

20. Refugee programmes need not impede a country's legitimate development aspirations. The United States supported the UNHCR policy on promoting alternatives to refugee camps. Around two thirds of the refugees under the protection of UNHCR currently lived outside camps. The collective goal should be to phase out existing refugee camps, avoid establishing new ones and ensure that refugees in cities received the help that they needed. Furthermore, the international community should step up its efforts to combat gender-based violence. The United States welcomed UNHCR's leading role in implementing the Safe from the Start initiative to address gender-based violence in global humanitarian emergencies. More attention should also be given to the dangers faced by humanitarian workers in the field. The United States continued to be a generous supporter of UNHCR and had contributed more than US\$ 1.2 billion to the Programme in 2014.

21. **Mr. Dačić** (Serbia) said that, as the country with the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in a situation of protracted displacement in Europe, Serbia had a clear understanding of their needs. Serbia had granted asylum to more than 500,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, 58,000 of whom had remained in the country at the beginning of 2014 despite the combined efforts of Serbia, UNHCR and the international community to resolve that problem. Serbia had since managed to integrate some 10,000 refugees into local communities. The fact that UNHCR had recommended cessation of the refugee status of Croatian refugees displaced by the 1991–1995 conflict had placed Serbia under additional pressure to resolve the refugee situation in the country. That recommendation had been made without adequate consultation of the country of asylum, namely Serbia. Given that only 18 per cent of Croatian refugees had returned to their home country, it could not be argued that their fear of persecution was no longer well-founded. Moreover, they still faced many obstacles in exercising their occupancy, tenancy, pension and employment rights. As a result, the majority of Croatian refugees preferred local integration in Serbia. The first report on the implementation of that recommendation would surely highlight those problems.

22. Some 220,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija remained in Serbia, despite the fact that Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) had called on the international community to organize the safe and free return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes. The obstacles to their return to Kosovo and Metohija included the poor security situation in the region, lack of protection of rights, including property rights, and curbs on access to public services. Serbia favoured a durable solution to the current situation based on free choice between voluntary repatriation to Kosovo and Metohija and integration in Serbia, and was committed to guaranteeing the rights of all internally displaced persons.

23. **Mr. Baloch** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan had been hosting Afghan refugees for more than three decades and had experience in dealing with internally displaced persons.

Pakistan currently hosted 1.6 million registered and more than 1 million unregistered Afghan refugees, in addition to around 1.5 million internally displaced persons. Recent floods had also displaced many people and destroyed a large number of homes. Despite those difficulties, Pakistan remained committed to implementing the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. He welcomed the establishment of the new democratically elected Government of Afghanistan. The international community should assist Afghanistan in devising its development plan for the years to come; in helping rural refugees transition to a life in an urban setting; and in facilitating the return of Afghan nationals to their country. Moreover, development partners should give the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees their full support with a view to making repatriation a durable solution. The voluntary return of Afghan refugees was the only viable solution to their protracted refugee situation. Pakistan had approved a new policy on Afghan refugees in 2013 and had begun the process of renewing 1.6 million expired “proof of registration” cards. Pakistan was grateful to the Governments of the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Canada for their assistance in resettling Afghan refugees and other refugees from Pakistan and encouraged other countries to follow suit.

24. **Mr. Elhassan** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had a long-standing tradition of welcoming refugees. The presence of large numbers of refugees in the Sudan for almost 40 years had impoverished parts of the country and placed a strain on basic services and the labour market. International assistance was needed to counteract the negative impact of refugee influxes on the environment in the eastern and central regions of the country. Basic services in refugee camps had deteriorated as a result of a decrease in the amount of financial assistance being provided to the Sudan. Consequently, many refugees were leaving those camps and relocating to urban areas. He called upon UNHCR to set aside part of its budget to address the situation of urban refugees. The international community should share the burden borne by host countries. The Sudan continued to receive a steady flow of asylum seekers from neighbouring countries in the region and was working with international partners to curb the phenomenon of human trafficking that was prevalent in the eastern region of the country. On the other hand, the improved security situation in Darfur had enabled around 4,000 people to return to their villages. In addition, international partners had assisted the Sudan in repatriating refugees from camps in the region.

25. **Mr. Tshibal** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the Democratic Republic of the Congo had always opened its borders to asylum seekers and had welcomed more than 60,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, who were accommodated in camps run by the Government with the support of UNHCR. In addition, more than 6,000 Congolese nationals who had sought refuge in the Central African Republic had been repatriated to their home country. Following the restoration of peace in the province of Equateur, more than 130,000 Congolese nationals had been repatriated from the Republic of the Congo, where they had sought asylum. In 2011, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had begun the process of repatriating Angolan refugees in cooperation with Angola and UNHCR. The pre-registration process funded by UNHCR had enabled 241,000 Rwandan refugees to be identified. The Democratic Republic of the Congo requested the assistance of UNHCR in carrying the identification process forward with a view to repatriating those refugees. More than 400,000 Congolese nationals had sought refuge in neighbouring countries and nearly 3 million persons had been forcibly displaced within the country. The signing of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region was testament to the country’s desire for peace and security to be restored in the Great Lakes Region.

26. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) said that Uganda was currently hosting 400,000 refugees. The country required adequate resources to ensure that asylum seekers had a reasonable quality of life. The Government of Uganda had initiated a process for improving conditions in refugee settlements. The process, in which UNHCR should play a leading role, included a

strategy aimed at empowering refugees and host communities, assigning civilian police to refugee settlements and re-establishing mobile courts.

27. Uganda recognized the need for alternative solutions to protracted refugee situations, such as granting Ugandan citizenship by registration or granting dual citizenship to refugees. UNHCR should establish a follow-up mechanism to address issues of enduring concern to member States, such as environmental rehabilitation, post-repatriation integration and resettlement opportunities. The UNHCR country team in Uganda was to be commended on its work.

28. **Mr. Anwari** (Afghanistan), observing that the new President of Afghanistan, Mr. Ashraf Ghani, had been sworn in on 29 September 2014, said that the country's new Government intended to address a number of pressing issues such as the repatriation of refugees and their reintegration into Afghan society. The Government would reassure donor States of its commitment to promoting the ongoing process of refugee repatriation which had seen the return to Afghanistan of almost one quarter of the country's population in recent years. Nevertheless, some 2.5 million Afghans still lived as refugees outside Afghanistan. Assisting refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons was a national priority.

29. Under the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, gains had been made in implementing a programme to assist host communities in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan and facilitate the return and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees. There had been considerable progress in the areas of education, health, infrastructure and human rights, particularly for women in Afghanistan, but many challenges remained. The continued support and assistance of the international community was requested to help meet those challenges.

30. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) said that UNHCR wished to work with the European Commission and the European Asylum Support Office to remedy shortcomings in its common European asylum system and on protection issues. UNHCR welcomed increased EU resettlement quotas. To combat human trafficking by criminal gangs in Central America, in particular in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, close cooperation was required between those countries, Mexico, the United States and UNHCR. Unaccompanied minors in particular were falling victim to such gangs.

31. He commended the Safe from the Start initiative, which had helped UNHCR boost its own efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence and provide victims with support. He agreed with points made by the representative of the United States on the need to link humanitarian and development aid, and on alternatives to refugee camps. UNHCR was developing its security system and strengthening capacity at headquarters in order to improve its support for field operations.

32. It was untrue that the Serbian Government had not been consulted by UNHCR about applying the cessation clause in respect of Croatian refugees. Lengthy dialogue had taken place and the date for declaring cessation had been pushed back to 2017. Cessation would in no way disadvantage Croatians in Serbia with regard to property and tenancy rights, pensions or the right of return. However, UNHCR recognized that the final decision on the matter rested with the Serbian Government. UNHCR supported the right of return of displaced persons from Kosovo. Serbia needed to improve its system for determining refugee status, because it was bound to become a major destination and transit country for asylum seekers in the near future.

33. UNHCR commended Pakistan's generous refugee policy and supported its approach to the resettlement of Afghan refugees. The new Afghan Government should make the issue a matter of priority and the international community must do more to support the

process. It should not be forgotten, however, that Afghanistan had made significant efforts to integrate 5 million returnees.

34. UNHCR directed 42 per cent of its non-earmarked funds to Africa, but operations there were drastically underfunded. He welcomed cooperation with the Sudanese Government in eastern Sudan and its decision to open its borders to refugees from South Sudan. Uganda's settlement transformation policy was welcome. Although UNHCR was unable to assist with the rehabilitation of areas after refugees left, it supported the views of the Ugandan Government in that regard.

35. **Mr. Dossou Codjo** (Benin) said that most refugees from Togo had returned home or opted for naturalization in Benin. Of the 287 persons who had refused both options, none had been found to be in need of international protection. Benin was working to improve its legislation regarding refugees and appealed for support from UNHCR in implementing the conventions on statelessness, to which Benin had been a party since 2011.

36. **Mr. Ole Lenku** (Kenya) said that, as the world's attention shifted to new emergencies in the Middle East, the plight of refugees in Africa should not be forgotten. The repatriation of long-term Somali refugees required investment in infrastructure in those parts of Somalia that had been pacified. The High Commissioner's Global Initiative on Somali Refugees was welcome, but the international community and development partners had thus far failed to live up to their pledges. Kenya would not compromise on security in the face of terrorist attacks and terrorist infiltration of the ranks of the displaced must be prevented. UNHCR should provide funds to implement its tripartite agreement with the Governments of Kenya and Somalia on the voluntary return of refugees to Somalia. Overall, funding for Somali refugees had declined year on year. Investment should be aimed especially at young people in Somalia who might otherwise be drawn to extremist groups. With regard to the situation in South Sudan, his Government had granted *prima facie* refugee status to all those who had fled from that country to Kenya.

37. **Ms. Kaji** (Japan) said that the Government of Japan was especially concerned by the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. It had provided US\$ 7.8 million in emergency aid for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq and a further US\$ 25.5 million for IDPs in Iraq and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Humanitarian assistance for the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries thus far amounted to US\$ 400 million. Japan attached particular importance to combating sexual violence in conflicts and supported the age, gender and diversity (ADG) approach adopted by UNHCR. Japan would continue to fund a pilot project for the resettlement of Myanmar refugees.

38. As at the end of September, Japan had disbursed US\$ 182.25 million to UNHCR in 2014, and had increased the proportion of non-earmarked funds from 43.1 per cent to 53.7 per cent. It was to be hoped that UNHCR would work to expand its donor base. The Government of Japan wished to be kept informed of how the agreement of April 2014 between UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on situations where populations of humanitarian concern included refugees and IDPs, was being implemented in the field. Japan welcomed the strengthened partnership between UNHCR and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which was manifested, for example, in a joint project in Uganda to assist South Sudanese and Congolese refugees to grow rice. Japan would welcome continued updates on the reform process in UNHCR and its efforts to raise funds in the private sector, improve its auditing system and enhance its capacity for emergency response.

39. **Mr. Hamza** (Somalia) said that his Government planned to create a federal system, review the Constitution and hold national elections by 2016. A national commission for refugees and IDPs was operational and a technical commission established to implement Somalia's tripartite agreement with Kenya and UNHCR was assisting the spontaneous



return of refugees to selected areas of south-central Somalia. If that pilot programme proved successful, similar ones would follow. Tripartite agreements with other host countries could enhance dialogue aimed at resolving the problems of displaced populations when conditions in Somalia permitted. Durable solutions would remain elusive without international assistance and a commitment to tackling the root causes of Somalia's problems.

40. **Ms. Raoul** (Republic of the Congo) said that the Congo was hosting 51,000 refugees and asylum seekers, many of them aged between 15 and 35, from 17 countries. There had been a significant rise in arrivals since 2013, largely due to the deteriorating situation in the Central African Republic. Most refugees were concentrated in rural areas in the Likouala department. Because of the difficult conditions there, some had moved to the cities in search of work or to study. On the other hand, around 110,000 former refugees had returned to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the cessation of refugee status had been declared in the case of citizens of Angola and Rwanda. More than 4,000 applications for exemption from the cessation clause had, however, been made by Rwandan refugees. The Congo would start to issue biometric travel documents to asylum seekers and refugees from 2015, attesting to their status under the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees. New asylum legislation would be enacted in the same year.

41. **Mr. Alaydarous** (Yemen) said that efforts were continuing to bring about constitutional reform and transform Yemen into a federal State. However, the activities of terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, in several provinces were a constant threat. In addition to the large number of refugees and asylum seekers, there were as many as 750,000 undocumented immigrants, mostly from the Horn of Africa, in Yemen. Further waves of such immigrants, principally from Ethiopia, were expected. All such refugees and immigrants enjoyed equal access to public services and employment. Some even obtained university scholarships. The overall situation was, however, unsustainable. The 2013 Sana'a Declaration on asylum and migration had been an important advance, but international support for host countries remained inadequate.

42. **Mr. Melchenko** (Belarus) said that Belarus, with the support of the European Union and UNHCR, had carried out a series of projects to address mixed migration flows into Belarus and to assist refugees. The influx of persons seeking protection in Belarus had quadrupled in 2014 compared with the previous year, largely due to arrivals from south-eastern Ukraine. The Government was looking at ways to improve its asylum and refugee legislation. Questions relating to the protection of refugees could be resolved only through increased cooperation and coordination between the States concerned, international organizations and civil society.

43. **Ms. Chohan** (South Africa) said that more than 800,000 asylum seekers had arrived in South Africa between 2008 and 2013. Asylum seekers and refugees had access to certain services, including free schooling and health care. Given that asylum seekers were not subject to any restriction of movement, about 70 per cent of them chose to live in Gauteng province, the economic hub of the country. The asylum application review process had been overhauled and processing now took an average of three months. Real gains had been made in terms of integrating asylum seekers into South African society, but tension sometimes led to violence between local communities and asylum seekers and refugees. Rather than seeking to expand the rights of asylum seekers and refugees through the courts, thereby fuelling still greater social strife in a country with high unemployment, UNHCR should work with the South African authorities to fund integration and social harmonization. South Africa was committed to sharing its biometric database with UNHCR in order to help address the problem of unidentified asylum seekers and refugees, especially women and children, who went missing and whose fate was unknown. Economic migrants continued to attempt to circumvent migration laws by using the asylum process. In an effort

to unburden the asylum system, a quarter of a million Zimbabweans had been granted special dispensation in 2010. They would soon be granted a second concession. Although more than 3,700 Angolan nationals had heeded South Africa's declaration of cessation of their refugee status, only 31 had opted for voluntary repatriation.

44. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) said that UNHCR would assist Benin with legislative reform. Funding the Global Initiative on Somali Refugees was a matter of priority. The commitment of the Government of Somalia to allowing voluntary repatriation of refugees when it became possible was of key importance. He welcomed the return of refugees from the Congo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Congo's reception of refugees from the Central African Republic. UNHCR wished to work with the Congo on the possible return of Rwandan refugees. The generosity of Yemen towards refugees was praiseworthy and UNHCR supported the Sana'a Declaration. The efforts of Belarus and South Africa to improve their asylum systems were welcome. UNHCR appreciated the fact that asylum seekers enjoyed full rights in South Africa, which until 2013 had long hosted the single greatest number of asylum seekers of any country in the world.

*The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.*