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REPORT OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
(4 - 6 March 2003)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency, Ambassador Fisseha Yimer (Ethiopia). He informed the Committee of requests for observer status from Angola, Belarus, Botswana, Burundi, Guatemala, Jordan, Luxembourg, Oman and Ukraine. In accordance with the decision taken by the Executive Committee at its fifty-third session on observer participation (A/AC.96/973, para. 29 (b)), the Standing Committee agreed to these requests.
2. The regional strategic presentations (Asia and CASWANAME) under agenda item 4(ii) on programmes and funding, as well as item 5(ii) on safety and security issues, were chaired by His Excellency, Ambassador Jean-Marc Boulgaris (Switzerland), Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee.
3. The Deputy High Commissioner shared some brief introductory remarks in which she referred to the integration of the Global Objectives and the various goals of the Agenda for Protection as points of reference for UNHCR's work. She also drew attention to progress in renewing the information systems for the financial and supply chain services through the Management Systems Renewal Project (MSRP). Launch of this was now anticipated in autumn this year for Headquarters and in 2004 for the field.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING AND WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2003

4. The agenda for the meeting (EC/53/SC/CRP.1) was adopted. The Standing Committee's work programme for 2003, as discussed at the Planning Meeting of the Committee, held on 12 December 2003, was adopted without revision (EC/53/SC/CRP.2).

III. PROGRAMMES AND FUNDING

A. Update on programmes and funding

5. The Deputy High Commissioner introduced the latest figures for 2002 and projections for 2003 presented in document EC/53/SC/CRP.3. This was followed by a general update on funding by the Director of the Division of Communication and Information who expressed his appreciation to all delegates for their support in 2002, and for the encouraging results of the 2002 Pledging Conference, which had mobilised USD 317 million from 32 donors. The Director cautioned however that the Office again faced the prospect of a shortfall in 2003. He emphasised the need for early contributions, with limited earmarking, and called for improved co-ordination with donors regarding bilateral aid, in order to avoid leaving gaps in basic assistance. UNHCR would continue to submit project proposals aimed at tapping into complementary sources of funding, and, particularly in relation to the "4Rs" approach, would aim to ensure integrated planning by all stakeholders to enhance the credibility of the funding proposals. Private Sector Fund Raising and Public Affairs activities would also continue to play an important role in efforts to achieve funding diversification and enhanced predictability. In conclusion, the Director drew attention to the major challenges for 2003, notably the securing of early funding for the repatriation of Angolan refugees; needs in West Africa for which new appeals would soon be circulated; and emergency preparedness for the situations developing in and around Iraq. He reiterated the DHC's plea to the donor community to ensure that high profile emergencies did not receive funding at the expense of the Annual Programmes or of lower-profile Supplementary Programmes.

6. Several delegations announced their contributions for 2003, and confirmed continued, strong support for UNHCR. There was broad approval of the High Commissioner's realistic approach to addressing funding shortages at an early stage, but a number of delegations expressed concern over the resulting impact of budget reductions on refugees, implementing partners, and host countries. Many also emphasized the importance of minimizing cuts in the field, and several sought to clarify the criteria applied for priority-setting in relation to budget reductions. One delegation regretted that document EC/53/SC/CRP.3 had arrived late and lacked clarity. Another stressed the need to remain attentive to forgotten crises, referring to Africa in particular. While there was general encouragement for UNHCR to continue to work with partners on different initiatives, one delegation queried the extent to which the "4Rs" approach was being implemented in an integrated manner with other agencies. Several delegations noted with appreciation the inclusion of a table showing major host countries in the update document provided at the meeting, recommending that this practice should continue.

7. In their respective responses, the Deputy High Commissioner, the Controller and the Director of the Division of Communication and Information all assured the Committee that

UNHCR would continue to work on strengthening the predictability and regularity of the funding base, and on managing assets and any shortfalls in order to minimize the impact on the beneficiaries. The Office would pursue efforts to ensure that its work with its partners was complementary, and that gaps in assistance were met. Delegations were informed that further details on the impact of cuts would be available as of April 2003.

8. In conclusion of this item, the Committee adopted a decision on programme and funding (contained in the Annex), having approved an amendment by one delegation.

B. Regional reviews

(i) Statement by the Assistant High Commissioner

9. The Assistant High Commissioner introduced the regional presentations by setting them in the context of a comprehensive, global review. He first recalled last year's deeply disturbing allegations of sexual exploitation in West Africa and drew attention to measures taken by UNHCR as both remedial and preventive action. Other areas highlighted included progress on registration, measures to improve staff security, and the implementation of UNHCR's strategic plan to put essential HIV/Aids services at the disposal of refugees in all countries. He also drew attention to major challenges confronting the work of the Office, such as growing xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment. He believed that the "Convention Plus" initiative would offer proactive means of addressing the shortcomings of the current asylum systems.

10. The Assistant High Commissioner concluded by emphasizing UNHCR's grave concern over the situations in Côte d'Ivoire and the potential emergency in the Middle East in relation to Iraq. On the other hand, some situations gave rise to hope: the repatriation operations in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Angola and in the Horn of Africa. Other areas where windows of opportunity for durable solutions appeared to be opening were in Sri Lanka, in Nepal for the Bhutanese refugees and in Bangladesh for the remaining Myanmar refugees. However, protracted situations, such as those in Colombia and Liberia, could only be resolved by a political solution.

(ii) Statement by the Director of the Department of International Protection

11. The Director of the Department of International Protection provided an oral update on implementation of the Agenda for Protection in anticipation of a more detailed progress report at the 27th meeting of the Standing Committee to take place in June. She identified three "tracks" for follow-up to the Agenda for Protection, describing the first as "operational". The Agenda for Protection had become an important platform for UNHCR's own protection strategies and interventions and was the basis for organization-wide ownership and commitment. The regional strategic presentations later in the meeting would demonstrate this. The second "track" she termed as "intergovernmental", based on shared ownership with ExCom. An updated matrix provided details of the planned ExCom conclusions, guidelines and studies, some of which were already underway. The third "track" of the Agenda implementation process concerned "tools development". Here the Director of DIP recalled the High Commissioner's "Convention Plus" initiative to develop special agreements to promote fairer burden-sharing, make durable solutions

more accessible and reduce migratory pressures on asylum systems. She recalled that such agreements would be addressed through the Forum process, and would be the subject of a consultation immediately after the Standing Committee's meeting.

(iii) Africa

12. In his opening statement, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa gave an overview of the main regional developments, drawing attention to some encouraging trends, such as the decrease over the past decade of total numbers of refugees, mainly through voluntary repatriations. He enumerated repatriation movements currently underway, and hopes for others, given ongoing peace processes. But he also spoke of new and continuing crises, particularly in West Africa, as well as protracted situations awaiting a political solution. As major protection challenges, he identified the following priority areas: promoting local capacity-building for host Governments and national NGOs, combating SGBV, preserving the civilian character of refugee camps, strengthening UNHCR's protection presence in countries of asylum and enhancing refugee resettlement. He stressed the importance of improving standards of assistance in programmes in Africa in order to enhance refugees' quality of life, reduce dependency on humanitarian aid, mitigate the negative impact of hosting refugees on the environment and on local communities. The main problem continued to be that of inadequate resources to address the declining standards of assistance in Africa. One way forward was to forge stronger partnerships with host governments as in Zambia, with other United Nations agencies (as demonstrated by the ECHA mission to the United Republic of Tanzania), with regional organizations and with NGOs.

13. The Director of WFP in Geneva described the food situation in Africa, drawing urgent attention to funding shortfalls resulting in reduced food rations and major interruptions in the food pipeline affecting refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Algeria and Sudan (among other countries). He highlighted the grave consequences of the current situation such as malnutrition, protection problems, premature repatriation and strained relations with host governments and communities. WFP urgently needed 112,000 metric tons of food worth USD 84 million over the next six months to avert major food shortages in refugee camps.

14. In the debate that ensued many delegations referred to protection priorities, and urged UNHCR to increase its protection staff in the field. They also called for measures to ensure the separation of armed elements from civilian refugees and to improve refugee registration. Several delegations stressed the importance of ensuring that protection needs of refugee women and children were adequately addressed, and not just through ad hoc measures. Many delegations made special mention of SGBV and the need to continue to combat this grave problem. One delegation mentioned the lessons learned from the evaluations on refugee women, refugee children and community services. Two delegations also mentioned the importance of working with the African Union on protection issues, considering that the Comprehensive Implementation Plan (CIP) offered a good framework to complement the Agenda for Protection. Several delegations also acknowledged the importance of resettlement as a protection tool and durable solution and welcomed the increase in resettlement staff in Africa, as well as the establishment of two resettlement hubs.

15. A common theme dominating the discussions was that of funding shortfalls and their implications for refugee and returnee programmes in Africa. Many delegations spoke of the scarcity

of food and deplored other looming food shortages. Some delegations urged donors to increase their assistance to countries hosting large numbers of refugees and welcomed efforts to quantify the contributions of these countries, encouraging the pursuit of strategies to promote international solidarity and burden-sharing. There was general support for programmes such as the Zambia Initiative, aimed to enhance refugee self-reliance while providing development assistance to refugee-hosting areas and communities. However, one delegation expressed concern that local integration should not be allowed to shift the burden of hosting refugees from the international community to the host country. Two delegations made specific reference to the problem of HIV/AIDS in Africa and the need for an effective response

16. Many delegations spoke of the worrying situation in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire: some delegations urged UNHCR to pursue efforts to evacuate Liberian refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, or at least move them further from the conflict zones. One delegation offered the possibility of resettling some of the Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, once they had been evacuated. Another delegation also noted the need for emergency preparedness with regard to the situation in Zimbabwe and possible voluntary repatriation to Sudan. This delegation along with one other stressed the need for increased UNHCR response in West Africa and particularly emphasised the Guinea programme.

17. A number of delegations welcomed encouraging developments with respects to voluntary repatriation, but insisted on the importance of ensuring that its voluntary nature be respected, with sustainable reintegration as the main focus of repatriation operations. Several delegations also pointed out that voluntary repatriation needed to be looked at in the broader context of conflict resolution and reintegration of returnees. Many delegations were pleased to note the positive developments in Angola and pledged their support. Some expressed the hope that the Government of Angola would also contribute to the reintegration needs of returnees. The observer delegation of Angola outlined the Government's timetable of activities planned for the reintegration of refugees in their areas of origin, but drew attention to many obstacles such as funding, landmines and competing priorities. Two delegations also stressed the need for exit strategies to be factored into reintegration programmes.

18. On the subject of partnerships, a number of delegations called for improved inter-agency cooperation, particularly with regard to the gap between humanitarian relief and development assistance. They considered that the "4 Rs" was an important way forward in repatriation situations. Many delegations also stressed the need to address the root causes of refugee flows and encouraged UNHCR to work with the African Union and other regional organizations on conflict resolution and conflict prevention. In this regard, several delegations mentioned the need to consider how UNHCR could further contribute to the NEPAD initiative.

19. Responding to specific observations, the Senior Legal Advisor of the Regional Bureau for Africa confirmed that the protection priorities forming the basis of this discussion had framed the strategic planning workshops held in the field recently, and would be reflected in planning for 2004. He also gave an update on progress in implementing the CIP, giving examples of a survey recently completed on national refugee legislation, plans to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, and cooperation with the African Parliamentary Union. In his closing remarks, the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa welcomed the constructive dialogue and said that whilst 2002 had produced mixed results for the refugee regime in Africa with many outstanding challenges, there were also opportunities for durable solutions if the

peace processes currently underway were successful. The Assistant High Commissioner also confirmed that discussions were underway with IOM to resolve the problem of third country nationals fleeing Côte d'Ivoire, some of whom are stranded in neighbouring countries.

(iv) The Americas

20. The Director of the Regional Bureau outlined five main thrusts of UNHCR's strategy in the region: strengthening asylum systems; broadening local integration opportunities, especially for refugee women; reinforcing the emerging resettlement countries; developing new systems for registration and documentation; and monitoring border areas around Colombia to protect and assist refugees and promote the receptivity of local communities. She gave details of progress made in these areas, and welcomed in particular the passing of legislation in Peru, Paraguay and El Salvador, including measures to address gender-based persecution. She also stressed the need to explore a regional solution for strengthening asylum systems in countries in the Caribbean, with the assistance of regional fora. On durable solutions, the Director explained the strategy to actively pursue opportunities for integration, included the extension of micro-credit schemes, building on the successful experience with Guatemalan refugees in Mexico. The resettlement programme in the emerging resettlement countries was continuing; and efforts were being made to expand resettlement criteria beyond protection needs to include also cases where there were no local integration possibilities. On gender issues, the Director stressed the commitment of the Bureau to provide opportunities for the social and economic self-reliance of refugee and IDP women, recalling that eight of the 55 IDP associations in Colombia, representing some 30,000 IDPs, were headed by women; and that micro-credit schemes developed in Ecuador, Argentina, Mexico and Costa Rica targeted women in particular. On registration, she described several successful initiatives for recording data and providing documentation for refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. In order to improve protection and access to asylum in the countries bordering Colombia, the Office was focusing on registration; border monitoring; relocation of reception centres away from borders; implementation of community-based projects to promote the receptivity of host communities and to counter xenophobic sentiments vis-à-vis refugees; and the expansion of UNHCR's presence.

21. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the clear links with the global objectives and goals of the Agenda for Protection, as well as the focus on the gender perspective. One delegation spoke of the severe social and economic impact of forced displacement in Colombia, which was a drain on the nation's human, financial and material resources. Several delegations expressed gratitude for UNHCR's efforts in guiding and supporting the national authorities in relation to the protection of IDPs and the consolidation of local and regional asylum structures. Making reference to the Humanitarian Plan of Action, presented by the High Commissioner to the President of Colombia in November 2002, one delegation commended UNHCR's coordination role in respect of IDPs in Colombia and urged UNHCR to continue to work closely together with sister agencies, NGOs, and the Government. Some delegations expressed concern over the increasing number of Colombians fleeing into neighbouring countries and urged UNHCR and the international community to increase their financial support. One delegation enquired about the role UNHCR expected to play in the Government of Colombia's plan to return some 30,000 IDP families during 2003, and on its involvement in the United Nations humanitarian situation room.

22. Several delegations reconfirmed their commitment to improving the integrity of refugee protection and thanked UNHCR for its continued support in the establishment and strengthening of asylum systems. Two delegations joined UNHCR in encouraging those States in the region that have not done so to ratify the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. One delegation welcomed UNHCR's efforts to expand its resettlement referral capacities. Another delegation expressed its support for twinning arrangements between emerging and traditional resettlement countries and offered to host officials wanting to learn more about its resettlement programme. One delegation enquired about UNDP involvement in micro-credit schemes developed in the region. Acknowledging the focus on migration issues by governments in the Americas, another delegation encouraged UNHCR to continue its active participation on this issue to ensure that restrictive migration practices did not undermine refugee protection.

23. Responding to the interventions, the Director provided further details of programmes and reconfirmed UNHCR's close working relationship with other agencies and UN departments, in particular OCHA, in the Humanitarian Plan of Action. She called for adequate funding to enable its implementation over the coming two years, urging for more visibility for the humanitarian situation of IDPs in Colombia, and stressed that UNHCR would be involved in the Government's plan to return 30,000 IDP families only if the return was voluntary, safe and sustainable. She recalled that the humanitarian situation room had been established in December 2002, as a United Nations initiative with the objective of collecting, analysing and disseminating information on the humanitarian crisis. The Director confirmed that the Bureau was committed to assisting governments in the region to address the increasing number of asylum requests and acknowledged the concern of one delegation to ensure that refugee issues are incorporated into discussions on migration in the Puebla Process.

(v) Asia and the Pacific

24. In his update of regional activities, the Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific reviewed protection objectives set in early 2002, namely efforts to improve the quality of asylum, promote accession to the 1951 Convention, pursue durable solutions and improve emergency response capabilities in the region. He placed emphasis on achievements over the past year. Uppermost among these was the accession of Timor Leste (former East Timor) to the 1951 Convention, the repatriation of refugees from West Timor and their reintegration in their villages of origin. Elsewhere in the region, significant progress had also been made towards durable solutions, bringing hope to refugees or displaced persons in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. However, there had been a number of setbacks in the field of international protection in the Asia-Pacific region, as enumerated in the summary circulated ahead of the meeting.

25. Many delegations expressed support for the work of UNHCR in the region, particularly with respect to protection challenges. On the issue of accession to the 1951 Convention, two delegations noted that countries in the region had been exemplary in granting asylum to refugees, despite the fact that most had not acceded to this instrument. One delegation explained that huge national populations and the risk of sizeable movements across borders accounted for low accession rates, as well as the fact that the region was home to a large part of the developing world. The concepts of international solidarity and burden-sharing had special significance in this context. While acknowledging the enormity of the challenges, other delegations noted that the long tradition of hospitality should not be a substitute for accession. The issue of North

Koreans in China was highlighted by a number of delegations, who expressed support for UNHCR's requests for access in order to assess whether some among them needed international protection. The Chinese delegation stated that North Koreans on Chinese territory were illegal immigrants seeking employment

26. Some delegations expressed regret over the suspension of the tripartite agreement between Cambodia, Viet Nam and UNHCR to address the protection concerns of Montagnard refugees. Several delegations also voiced support for UNHCR's efforts to find durable solutions for Muslim refugees from Myanmar remaining in Bangladesh. One delegation, however, asked UNHCR to retain a protection role beyond its planned phase-down later this year. Another delegation also insisted that UNHCR should continue its returnee monitoring role in Myanmar. Several delegations welcomed the hope for the return home of displaced persons in Sri Lanka, made possible by the peace process. One delegation also drew attention to the need to further explore the possibility of voluntary repatriation of Tamil refugees from India to Sri Lanka. Some delegations noted with appreciation measures taken by UNHCR to address the sexual and gender-based Violence (SGBV) issues in Nepal and asked UNHCR to encourage the Government to prosecute perpetrators. The prospect of a possible end to the Bhutan-Nepal stalemate was widely welcomed and UNHCR's involvement in solutions was called for. Several delegations made reference in their statements to the Bali follow-up process, expressing their support for a comprehensive solution along the lines of the secondary movement initiative, which should examine the root causes of movement and effective protection.

27. An observer delegation representing NGOs voiced strong concern about the possible *refoulement* of North Koreans in China as well as the consequences of Australia's "Pacific Solution," which were resulting in burden-shifting instead of burden-sharing. This delegation also called upon Cambodia to grant UNHCR access to Montagnard asylum-seekers, and expressed concern about the lack of legal rights for refugees in Thailand and the absence of provincial admissions boards, encouraging Thailand to consider granting asylum to persons fleeing the consequences of war. Concerning the end of care and maintenance of Myanmar refugees in Bangladesh, the NGO delegation cautioned that repatriation was not a durable solution for many of this group, and recommended considering resettlement as an option.

28. In his closing remarks, the Director thanked delegations for the support they had expressed for UNHCR's efforts in the region. He affirmed that UNHCR would not shy away from its protection functions for the remaining refugees in Bangladesh, and would ensure that repatriation took place only on a voluntary basis. In Nepal, UNHCR had taken immediate remedial action to support victims, institute measures to prevent future abuse and increase its presence in the camps. A comprehensive, burden-sharing approach was being considered to complement bilateral efforts to find solutions to the Bhutan-Nepal issue. He acknowledged the demographic challenges in the region, as well as the hospitality of States in providing asylum. He observed, however, that with migratory movements now increasingly dwarfing refugee populations in Asia, distinguishing refugees and asylum-seekers from economic migrants would require special measures, beyond those provided for in the 1951 Convention.

(vi) Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (CASWANAME)

29. UNHCR's presentation on its strategies in this region was given in two parts, one of which focused on latest developments in relation to the Afghan programme. The Deputy Director responsible for the Afghan operation recalled that 2002 had witnessed a major turn around in the Afghan operation with the repatriation of some two million refugees. He acknowledged the huge burden borne for decades by the Islamic Republic of Iran and by Pakistan. He also thanked donors who had financed the entire 2002 budget, thus ensuring no delay in implementation of the return programme and the launching of reconstruction efforts. In order to consolidate the initial successes, and in coordination with UNAMA, key priorities had included: developing strong linkages with the development agencies to support rural and urban reconstruction; pursuing reconciliation efforts in the north; and designing a comprehensive strategy for the some 300,000 drought victims in the south of the country. He also drew attention to the need to maintain assistance programmes for refugees remaining in host countries around Afghanistan.

30. In a presentation covering UNHCR's programmes elsewhere in the region, the Deputy Director covering these programmes identified two strategic priorities: to deal with the operational needs of successive emergencies; and to improve protection and help governments build asylum systems. He observed that the key challenge for the Middle East region was ensuring preparedness for the effects of a potential conflict in Iraq and explained that this was being realised through a modular response strategy, allowing for rapid contraction or expansion according to needs. UNHCR stood ready to support neighbouring States in providing protection and safety to refugees, and to work in close partnership with other agencies, notably the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Elsewhere in the region there were concerns over the slow resolution of several protracted situations where economic and social constraints did not allow local integration, and where repatriation had been limited. Resettlement opportunities from the region also required more flexibility and early indications of expected quotas. He noted that backlogs of pending asylum applications had been cleared in some countries, but were still a challenge in others due to the lack of human resources. He mentioned specific efforts that were being made in meeting the protection needs of women and children, in developing public awareness of UNHCR's mandate, and in consolidating partnerships with NGOs and regional institutions in the Arab and Islamic world. The latter were already bearing fruit in terms of increased funding from States and NGOs in the region.

31. In their statements, several delegations expressed support for UNHCR's initiatives with respect to contingency planning and preparedness for potential conflict in Iraq, although some delegations, in agreement with UNHCR, emphasized that war was not inevitable. One major hosting country warned that such concerns should not detract attention or funding support from the Afghan programme in order to avoid the risk of returnees heading back to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Several sought further explanations on UNHCR's partnership with other agencies, particularly in relation to the application of the "4Rs" concept in the Afghan return process.

32. Other developments in the CASWANAME region in which particular interest was expressed included the restructuring of the support unit dealing with women and children's issues. In relation to the protracted refugee situation in the Tindouf camps in the Western Sahara,

one delegation queried the statistics being used. He also regretted the lack of follow-up to the statements contained in the Global Appeal 2003, according to which UNHCR, in close co-ordination with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, would endeavour to enhance its protection work in the Tindouf refugee camps and would strive to conduct a registration of the Saharan camp population to better direct its protection and assistance activities.

33. Responding to questions by delegations relating to inter-agency collaboration in the context of the “4Rs”, the Deputy Director responsible for the Afghanistan programme drew attention to some of the realities of operational implementation. He explained that not all agencies were working at the same speed as UNHCR due to the nature of their roles (sometimes advisory and not operational) or the availability of financial means. Merging UNHCR activities with development programmes was a gradual and time-consuming process. All actors would need to work together with the awareness that it could take several years to create adequate conditions for return. UNHCR’s involvement in helping the new Afghan Government to develop its capacity was evolving, and would also need ongoing and committed collaboration. On the question of support for women and children’s issues, it was explained that a network of four national officers based in Yemen, Syria, Egypt and Jordan, supervised by a Senior Regional Coordinator, would strengthen UNHCR’s capacity to respond to these problems on a case-by-case basis. With reference to the Tindouf camp populations, the Deputy Director for the CASWANAME region acknowledged that there had been a number of constraints, but that UNHCR was currently in negotiations with other parties involved, including refugee leaders, to update the figures established in a census carried out in 1998-2000.

(vii) Europe

34. The Director of the Europe Bureau identified many challenges facing this region at a time of transition. Asylum and migration were receiving even greater attention in the new security environment following the 11 September events. Greater hostility to asylum-seekers had led to increasingly restrictive measures in many countries. The European Union had nearly completed the first phase of asylum harmonization under the Amsterdam Treaty and was now embarking on a historic enlargement that would extend its borders to Eastern Europe. UNHCR was contributing to the harmonization of asylum law and policy and would also seek to foster a protection-oriented dialogue on both sides of the new external border of the European Union.

35. In the Balkans, UNHCR was phasing out of large-scale assistance operations, while continuing operations in Kosovo. It was also boosting efforts to assist governments in the region to build effective asylum systems, while working closely with other organizations in finding new approaches to managing mixed flows and addressing the horrendous problems of trafficking. In the Northern Caucasus, UNHCR was working as part of the UN country team to protect and assist displaced Chechens including those returning voluntarily to Chechnya, when feasible. In the Southern Caucasus, UNHCR was seeking to give impetus to durable solutions and to help develop viable asylum systems. This approach was making it possible to phase down assistance.

36. The Director also described how UNHCR was making gender and age analysis, and refugee participation, standard features of programmes, both in the legal and social areas. In the case of women, particular attention was given to promoting gender-sensitive asylum policies

and practices, including gender-based persecution as an eligibility criterion in the asylum procedure. The Europe Bureau continued to be concerned with the situation of separated children, particularly those who were being detained in some countries and deported without necessary safeguards. Increasing numbers of these children disappeared shortly after arrival, during the procedure or after being finally rejected and ran a high risk of falling victim to trafficking and other crime.

37. In their interventions, several delegations complimented UNHCR on its programmes in the Balkans, approving its decision to phase down its post-Dayton assistance activities. They expressed concern, however, that durable solutions still remained to be found for large groups of displaced, and encouraged governments and other actors in the region to take more concrete action, remove obstacles and improve security conditions so as to pave the way for sustainable, durable solutions and, in particular, minority returns.

38. Two delegations encouraged UNHCR to continue its useful involvement in the European Union harmonization and enlargement processes. One delegation stressed that the development of a common European asylum space should not lead to an 'iron curtain' across the continent. One delegation encouraged Western European governments to expand the resettlement opportunities. Another welcomed the Europe Bureau's initiative to review the structure of UNHCR's presence in Western Europe.

39. Two delegations expressed support for UNHCR's courageous work and pursuit of solutions in the Caucasus, observing that this sub-region must not be forgotten and should continue to attract financial support from donors. UNHCR was commended for its effective efforts to hand over to and coordinate between partners in Azerbaijan and Armenia. One delegation called for a clearer strategy and better cooperation with the Georgian Government and other partners to find solutions for the Chechen caseload in the Pankisi Valley. One delegation questioned UNHCR's strategic aims in the Northern Caucasus, recommending that UNHCR should transfer emphasis to reintegration assistance in Chechnya. This delegation also called for a meeting to be held in 2003 within the framework of the CIS Conference follow-up process.

40. In response to specific enquires by delegations, the Director gave further details of needs confronting the displaced in South-Eastern Europe, particularly where rates of return were still low and called for measures both at national and local level. He welcomed progress made in Serbia and Montenegro, in particular with its National Strategy, and encouraged donor support to meet substantial needs for sustainable integration and return solutions. UNHCR would continue to advocate for development assistance in support of these solutions. Lastly, he confirmed UNHCR's interest in the continuation of the CIS Conference follow-up process and would explore possibilities for a meeting in 2003 or in 2004 with interested governments.

(viii) Global programmes

41. Presenting UNHCR's strategies for its global programmes, the Director of the Division of Operational Support observed that the success of these programmes would be measured through the integration of the related global objectives and the goals of the Agenda for Protection into regional programmes. This would demand cooperation with a range of actors in order to create synergies and situate UNHCR's work in broader frameworks such as the Millennium

Development Goals. She went on to highlight key areas where efforts were being made, notably in promoting the relief to development linkages; measures to protect the environment; social protection; needs of refugee women and those of refugee children; efforts to counter SGBV; education; HIV/AIDS; and community development. Efforts to improve programme standards, indicators and tools, included work on registration (Project Profile), a review of standards and indicators for planning and reporting and the revision of manuals and handbooks. Many of these measures were being reinforced through training workshops and capacity-building initiatives.

42. On the issue of HIV/AIDS, one delegation called for an inter-agency assessment of the impact of the pandemic to draw lessons and help to plan and organize activities. Another delegation welcomed Project Profile as a much-needed response to improving registration, but urged UNHCR to accelerate the process of its implementation, offering to help with funding and technical expertise. At the suggestion of the Chair, it was agreed that a paper on global programmes would be made available ahead of the meeting the following year, along with the regional summaries.

IV. PROTECTION/PROGRAMME POLICY

A. Economic and social impact of massive refugee populations on host developing countries, as well as other countries

43. Introducing the conference room paper EC/53/SC/CRP.4 on this item, the Director of the Division of Operational Support drew attention to the findings it contained of several country-specific studies and missions, which clearly demonstrated both negative and positive impacts of massive refugee populations on host communities. She also reiterated the commitment of UNHCR to continue advocating increased donor support to countries hosting large populations of refugees, while promoting the productive capacity of refugees and the development of refugee-hosting areas.

44. In the discussions that followed, several delegations acknowledged the significant socio-economic impact of massive refugee populations on host developing countries. Some delegations insisted that more country-specific studies were called for, and agreed that much remained to be done to assess the impact of refugees at local level. In this vein, several delegations welcomed the work undertaken last year towards a quantification of hosting countries' contributions and proposed that this should continue and be refined.

45. A number of host developing country delegations emphasized the need to improve international burden-sharing and voiced concern that rehabilitation efforts by the international community were minimal compared to the damage suffered. One delegation also suggested that the response of the international community to refugee problems should be institutionalized and urged UNHCR to envisage reserving a percentage of its Annual Programme Budget for rehabilitation activities.

46. Another delegation drew attention to the gross disparity between expenditure by developed countries on their refugee and asylum systems and their contribution to addressing refugee problems in Africa. This delegation, joined by others, looked forward to the "Convention Plus" initiative of the High Commissioner as a possible framework in which to find

acceptable solutions to deal with the largely negative impact of large numbers of refugees on developing countries. Several delegations also emphasized UNHCR's important catalytic and advocacy role in promoting partnerships, as had been demonstrated by the Zambia initiative which, they felt, should be replicated in other developing countries.

47. One delegation felt that for durable solutions to be achieved, the root causes of refugee situations must be addressed, including endemic poverty. This delegation also suggested that in order to have a better basis for burden-sharing, the data on the contributions of host countries should be based on comparisons between developed, developing and least developed countries. Another delegation noted that the socio-economic consequences of refugee impact must be addressed in a holistic manner, and take account of spill-over effects at regional level.

48. Responding to the many statements that had been made, the Director thanked donors for the continued support of the Zambia Initiative, confirming that it was the High Commissioner's intention to replicate this Initiative in other countries and to continue partnership efforts, including with the Bretton Woods institutions. Taking note of the proposed allocation of a percentage of the Annual Programme Budget to rehabilitation purposes, the Director drew attention to the financial difficulties facing UNHCR, which were likely to render this proposal very difficult to implement. She also agreed there was a need for further quantification of contributions of host countries, using more sophisticated indicators. The Director underscored UNHCR's commitment to undertake more studies on the economic and social impact of refugees on host countries, and called for the development of strong partnerships to support these efforts.

B. Safety and security issues

49. The Director of the Emergency and Security Service reviewed some of the key priorities in meeting the new challenges of the operating environment of UNHCR's staff, as described in the conference room paper (EC/53/SC/CRP.5). She drew attention to the rise in threats to the physical safety of humanitarian staff, including the deliberate targeting of staff. Efforts made in the past two years had focused on increasing financial, human and material resources for improving staff safety, and special measures had been taken for the current year to preserve security funds from potential budget cuts. Efforts to establish a flexible, qualified cadre of professional security officers had been accompanied by measures to develop a wider culture of security awareness and to help all staff members become more effective in managing their own, as well as colleagues' safety. This had resulted in the establishment of the UNHCR Security Policy, which was complementary to the UNSECOORD system-wide accountability scheme. Further measures included training sessions and tools development, notably the CD-Rom interactive self-learning course which had been adopted by other agencies in the United Nations system as a mandatory basic security training. Other initiatives would extend training support further across the organization and, in due course, possibly also to NGO and governmental partners. Work was ongoing in collaboration with DPKO and governments to find ways and means of improving UNHCR's response to refugee security as part of a comprehensive approach to protection. The deployment of two Canadian police officers to help build the capacity of the Guinea police in camp security management had set a useful precedent, and there was hope for further collaboration of this kind.

50. Several delegations expressed strong support and emphasized that, as security was an essential "cost of business", funds for security should be protected from the effects of budget cuts. There was also concern on the part of some delegations concerning the need for field safety advisors on the one hand, and the placement of limitations on the creation of posts on the other. With regard to collaboration with the IASC Security Management Network and UNSECOORD, several delegations commended the efforts towards better coordination of field security, but recognized that while UNSECOORD was present mainly in capital cities, UNHCR was an operational agency which needed more flexibility to field its own security staff for remote locations. Delegations welcomed the emphasis on developing the personal and professional responsibility of staff for security through awareness training and management capacity-building. Several also suggested extending availability of the CD-Rom training tool to NGO partners. One delegation sought clarification as to why there had been a 30 per cent increase in incidents reported in 2002, and where these were occurring. On the issue of refugee security, several delegations pointed out that this encompassed the challenges of dealing with and preventing SGBV, the protection of women and children, and the separation of armed elements from civilian populations. Another delegation believed, however, that UNHCR's role should be catalytic, and that operational interventions in relation to refugee security should remain the principal responsibility of other actors. There was a suggestion by one delegation that the Standing Committee should review the adequacy of current measures in one year's time.

51. In her response, the Director of ESS thanked delegations for their interest and support. She agreed on the need to pursue efforts to participate in joint inter-agency approaches but observed that finding a common policy between operational agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP and those which were more development-oriented, remained challenging. ESS would continue to emphasize an integrated approach to managing refugee security, incorporating protection, SGBV and other policy priorities into training and operational considerations. On the issue of increasing incidents, although this may have been due in part to improved collection of data, the Director believed that there was nevertheless a sense of greater threat to humanitarian workers in general as they were frequently caught up in a web of political factors on the ground.

V. COORDINATION

52. In a brief introduction of this item, the Head of Secretariat and Inter-Organization Service drew attention to the thematic framework of the update presented to the Standing Committee, in response to wishes expressed by certain members for a more analytical approach. The themes of "durable solutions" and "social services" were the focus of this update, which sought to examine how coordination was increasing between UNHCR and its partners in the UN system with respect to these issues. The process was being helped by the existence of the Millennium Development Goals and the effort by all agencies to articulate their programmes around these Goals. Increased dialogue and cooperation with other agencies was improving the social dimension of refugee protection, thanks to the mandate and resources of the respective agencies. He also provided additional information on recent interagency activities relating to specific programmes in Eritrea, Sri Lanka and North-West Somalia, as well as new developments in UNHCR's cooperation with WFP and with ECHA, in preparation for the humanitarian segment of ECOSOC.

53. The Director of the Social Protection Sector at the International Labour Office described the developing partnership between ILO and UNHCR, outlining areas in which the expertise of his organization complemented the work of UNHCR. ILO's action in the field of employment and social protection was very relevant in situations of displacement as demonstrated in programmes in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Colombia. Its expertise in community health programmes and micro-finance projects was particularly valuable to help break the cycle of poverty. The two organizations had recently launched a joint Employment Emergency Fund to finance rapid impact employment projects, and had cooperated in issuing joint guidelines for the formulation of projects.

54. Delegations generally welcomed the new format of the written update, and expressed support for UNHCR's new approach to development partners. One delegation, however, found the note to be too "UNHCR-centric" and another wished that the Coordination item had been taken up earlier in the meeting. Several delegations urged UNHCR to prioritise inter-agency coordination "from the top down" and make fuller use of interagency mechanisms such as IASC and the CAP process. Some looked forward to fuller discussion of this subject - particularly on OCHA's role with respect to IDPs - as part of the UNHCR 2004 process. One delegation questioned whether UNHCR's participation in country teams at field level was adequate.

55. It was also suggested by one delegation that the coordination update in future include UNHCR's cooperation with NGOs. The observer delegation representing the NGOs asked to be informed of follow-up to the recommendations that had emerged from the Task Force on Partnership initiated by the High Commissioner in 2002. Other specific proposals made under this item included the recommendation that the "4Rs" approach should be evaluated one year from now.

56. One delegation supported UNHCR's initiative to incorporate the Millennium Development Goals as a platform for more integrated planning and programming in the field, while several expressed interest in the recent collaboration with ILO, especially in the area of micro-finance, welcoming the concrete steps being undertaken by ILO and UNHCR to find common ground in their approach to transition issues and other areas of technical assistance to refugees and persons of concern. Another delegation expressed support for UNHCR's increased involvement in the CCA/UNDAF and PRSP processes in the field, highlighting those efforts aimed towards promoting them as mechanisms to place refugee/returnee issues on the development agendas of governments.

57. Responding to observations on UNHCR's involvement in the CAP process, the Director of the Division of Communication and Information, acknowledged that UNHCR was a comparative late-comer to this process, but was engaged in improving its overall planning and involvement in this area. He also hoped that the "4Rs" approach could help the CAP to become more of an "integrated" and not only a "coordinated" planning process. In answer to specific enquires, the Director of the Division of Operational Support, informed the Committee that Zambia or Kenya was likely to be designated as a fifth pilot country for implementation of the MOU with WFP, but that the start of the pilot scheme would probably be delayed until January 2004 due to WFP's financial constraints in the designated countries. She also indicated that

further discussions were needed on the revision of the MOU with UNICEF, concerning joint funding and the overall issue of resources, which could pose problems in specifying terms and areas of collaboration.

58. In reply to other comments, the Head of SIOS recalled that the Work Programme adopted by the Standing Committee called for relations with OCHA and other coordinating bodies to be covered in the Committee's discussion on Coordination in September 2003. He also mentioned UNHCR's increasing engagement in the Resident Coordinator system. UNHCR's involvement in the work of the UN country teams was assuming greater importance as part of the global commitment by UNHCR and its sister agencies towards a more collaborative and integrated approach to durable solutions.

VI. GOVERNANCE

59. At the suggestion of the Chairman, the Committee agreed that the general debate at the fifty-fourth session of the Executive Committee would be based on the High Commissioner's opening statement, as had been the case at the Committee's fifty-second and fifty-third sessions.

60. Under this item, the Chairman brought to the attention of the Committee various resolutions of relevance to UNHCR that had been adopted at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. They included: A/RES/57/187 on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (the so-called "omnibus" resolution which reflected new achievements and direction in the work undertaken by UNHCR and by the Executive Committee in the course of the year); as well as A/RES/57/183 on Assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

61. He also called attention to the resolution extending the mandate of the Office for a further five years from 1 January 2004 (A/RES/186) and which announced proposals by the High Commissioner on strengthening the function of his Office that would involve consultations with the Executive Committee. Another resolution of direct interest to the Committee was A/RES/57/185 which increased membership slots and opened the way for the election of three new members: Cyprus, Kenya and Yemen, which was expected at the coming session of ECOSOC in April 2003.

VII. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

62. The Chairman reminded the Committee of its forthcoming consultations on UNHCR 2004, on implementation of the Plan of Action on the prevention of sexual exploitation and the Code of Conduct, and on contributions by host developing countries. He also hoped that NGOs would be able to participate fully in these consultations in view of the important contribution they could bring to these discussions.

63. The Chairman then declared the closure of the Standing Committee's twenty-sixth meeting.

DECISION ON OVERALL PROGRAMME
AND FUNDING IN 2002 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2003

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decision at its fifty-third session on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/973, para. 26), in which it approved revised requirements under the 2002 Annual Programme Budget, as well as needs under Supplementary Programmes in 2002, in a total amount of \$ 1,030,343,900,

Recalling further that this decision also approved requirements of \$ 836,299,600 under the 2003 Annual Programme Budget, (including an amount of \$ 20,218,000 from the United Nations Regular Budget and \$ 7 million for Junior Professional Officers,

Recalling also the decisions on contributions of host countries as well as on funding mechanisms adopted by the Executive Committee at its fifty-third session (A/AC.96/973, paras. 24 and 25),

1. *Notes* that, based on currently known requirements, an additional amount of \$ 264.7 million is needed for seven supplementary programmes in 2003;
2. *Reaffirms* its continued support for efforts by the High Commissioner to seek innovative ways to financing UNHCR's budget, and *records* its appreciation of being kept regularly informed of progress made, with a view to a substantive and transparent discussion of the budget prior to its adoption by the Executive Committee;
3. *Acknowledges* with appreciation the burden shouldered by host developing and least developed countries and *notes* with appreciation the increased prominence given to these contributions in Standing Committee documentation and in the Global Appeal and other relevant documents;
4. *Recalls* that the Pledging Conference held on 3 December 2002 yielded a total of \$ 317 million in pledges towards requirements under the Annual Programme and Budget and Supplementary Programmes in 2003, and *notes* that this was an encouraging result in comparison with previous years;
5. *Expresses concern* that the High Commissioner has already been compelled to reduce the activities of UNHCR for 2003 as a result of anticipated funding shortfalls and *recognizes* that it is vital that resources are made available in a predictable, timely and flexible manner so as to avoid further reductions;
6. *Recognizes* that emergencies unfolding during 2003 are likely to result in the need for additional or expanded Supplementary Programmes and that additional resources, over and above those for the existing budgets, will be needed to meet such needs.