



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/988
7 July 2004

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE
HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Fifty-fifth session

REPORT OF THE TWENTY-NINTH MEETING
OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

(9 - 11 March 2004)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Committee, His Excellency Ambassador Jean-Marc Boulgaris (Switzerland). He informed the Committee of new requests for observer status from Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Croatia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Estonia, the Gambia, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, San Marino, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uruguay. In accordance with the decision taken by the Executive Committee at its fifty-fourth session on observer participation (A/AC.96/987, para. 27), the Standing Committee agreed to these requests.
2. The regional strategic presentation on Europe and the first half of that on Africa under agenda item 3 (ii) on programmes, budgets and funding were chaired by His Excellency Ambassador Alfredo Vicente Chiaradia (Argentina), Vice-Chairman of the Executive Committee.
3. The Deputy High Commissioner made some brief introductory remarks in which she referred to the need for UNHCR to be not only efficient, but transparent, accountable and flexible. The key to success would be ongoing review and evaluation and she outlined some of the developments in this area. The Deputy High Commissioner also reported on gains in efficiency in the supply chain and logistics group, as well as improvements in financial and logistical management through better projections and planning. She recognized UNHCR's reliance on working in partnership with other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

II. CHAIRMAN'S VISIT TO THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

4. The Chairman reported on his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran (3-8 February) and the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (9-15 February), and expressed his gratitude to both Governments for their welcome and assistance. In the former, one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world, the majority of refugees (especially the Afghans) lived in local communities. Some 70,000 Iraqi refugees had already returned to Iraq and the remainder seemed mostly eager to join them as soon as possible. The situation with regard to Afghan refugees was somewhat more complex. While 660,000 Afghan had returned home, over 1.5 million were still living in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many of the latter had integrated and would find it difficult to return home. The Chairman noted that the collaboration between the Iranian authorities and UNHCR was very good.

5. The Chairman's visit to Sri Lanka had as its main objective to observe the process of the Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs) programme in that country. His first impressions of this process had been satisfactory, although he did detect a modicum of impatience with the rate of progress. It was important to note that the *modus operandi* of development actors was very different from that of the humanitarian agencies and did not enjoy the same flexibility. Nevertheless, the Chairman had seen much which allowed cause for optimism. He admired the work being carried out by UNHCR and believed it was essential to continue UNHCR's presence in Sri Lanka until a durable solution was found for internally displaced persons and refugees. In the concluding remarks of his written report, the Chairman had noted that the mission served to confirm that considerable progress was being achieved and that full praise was due to both Governments for their efforts to protect the beneficiary populations and for their collaboration with UNHCR.

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE TWENTY-NINTH MEETING AND 2004 WORK PROGRAMME

6. The agenda for the meeting (EC/54/SC/CRP.1/Corr.1) was adopted. The Standing Committee's work programme for 2004, as approved at the planning meeting held on 8 December 2003, was also adopted without revision (EC/54/SC/CRP.2).

IV. PROGRAMMES, BUDGETS AND FUNDING

A. Update on Programmes, Budgets and Funding

7. The Deputy High Commissioner introduced the latest figures for 2003 and projections for 2004 presented in document EC/54/SC/CRP.3. This was followed by further comment by the Controller and the Director of the Division of Communication and Information, who expressed UNHCR's appreciation to all delegates for their support in 2003 and for the encouraging results of the Pledging Conference in December which had mobilized USD 358 million from 33 donors for 2004. In addition, UNHCR had received USD 20 million from the private sector in 2003. There was a larger carry-over into 2004 than in past years, most of which was due to exchange rate gains. More information was provided on the activities funded from the Operational Reserve Category II, a new mechanism which would allow donors to make contributions

towards activities additional to those budgeted in the Annual Programme Budget. Despite attempts to keep administrative costs to a minimum, staff costs had gone up due to a United Nations system-wide salary increase.

8. Although USD 955 million was approved by the Executive Committee for UNHCR's activities in 2004, developments since the approval of the budget had already led to an increase in the Office's total requirements to over USD 1 billion. Voluntary contributions received to date towards the annual programme now amounted to USD 410.5 million. UNHCR continued to need early, predictable, flexible and additional contributions. The Committee was informed of the new exercise in needs-based assessment which was designed to improve transparency and coordination amongst donors, NGOs and UNHCR.

9. Several delegations announced their contributions for 2004 and confirmed their commitment to working with UNHCR. Many expressed concern over the continued underfunding of the organization and several major donors appealed to other member States to be more generous. One representative also highlighted the important role played by host countries, and the burdens laid upon them, in view of the increasing refugee situations. There was a plea to other delegations not to forget the refugee situations in Africa.

10. Some delegations commended the clear budget presentations in the 2004 Global Appeal, but sought further explanation of the large carry-over from 2003 to 2004, and more detail on Category II of the Operational Reserve. Concerning the 30 per cent base level funding, one delegation would support UNHCR's efforts to broaden the funding base, but not through assessed funding, while another delegation commended UNHCR for seeking such innovative ways to fund the organization's budget. A few delegations expressed reservations about the decision to make early cuts to the 2004 budget on the basis that it would not be fully funded. The Controller was also asked for information on the Office's response to Executive Committee's call for administrative expenditures to be examined, with a view to reducing such expenditures as a proportion of global disbursements.

11. Several delegations commented that the two functions of evaluation and inspection, both of which were highly valued, should not be combined in the same person. Some asked to be reassured that the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit would continue to be well staffed. Several delegations remained concerned by the ongoing issues relating to temporary assistance posts and staff in between assignments. One delegation considered it would be useful if UNHCR's planning documents showed statistics on refugees and other persons of concern at the beginning of each year, with an indication of the changes that the Office expected by the end of the year as a result of its programmes and policies.

12. The Deputy High Commissioner expressed appreciation for the high level of interest in expanding the donor base. She also reassured delegations with regard to staffing of the Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit and would take seriously the comments on the role of the Inspector General's Office. The Controller and the Director of the Division of Communication and Information undertook to make clearer the presentation of various aspects of the budget for the next Standing Committee and, in the meantime, to provide delegations with additional information on the impact of exchange rate fluctuations, the evolution of administrative costs and Category II of the Operational Reserve. The Director also clarified that the 30 per cent base

level model was not an attempt to subject governments to assessed contributions, but rather was a tool for initial discussions related to funding and broadening the donor base with various States. He further explained that early cuts in the budget had been made to avoid end-of-year crises and were based on the best assessment possible.

13. In conclusion of this item, a number of members requested that a consultation be organized on the Operational Reserve. Towards the end of the meeting, the Committee adopted a decision on programme and funding (contained in the Annex), having approved several proposed amendments by delegations.

B. Oral Strategic Presentations

Statement by the Assistant High Commissioner

14. The Assistant High Commissioner introduced the regional presentations, commenting that in future UNHCR would have to reinforce refugee protection under the constraints of a changing world, including the more restrictive asylum climate and the need to protect humanitarian staff against the risk of attack. On the other hand, UNHCR staff could not protect and assist refugees from behind fortified buildings and armed vehicles.

15. The Assistant High Commissioner emphasized that the Office would continue to promote respect for the basic right of refugees to seek and enjoy asylum. In response to emergencies involving IDPs, UNHCR supported the Collaborative Approach through which it worked closely with other partners, in particular OCHA, but considered that further refinement was required so that this could be more effectively applied in situations such as the Sudan and Liberia. Another operational priority was the effective management and resolution of protracted refugee situations. The Office was particularly concerned about the protracted situations in the East and Horn of Africa and the funding shortages for partner agency WFP that were rendering the food chain precarious.

16. UNHCR was giving particular attention and priority to: the preparation and implementation of standards and indicators; the implementation of recently revised policies on women, children and community services; improved registration guidelines and techniques; and continuing implementation of the 2002/2004 HIV/AIDS and Refugees Strategic Plan. The Convention Plus Unit was working to develop multilateral special agreements including comprehensive plans of action, the first of which would be considering solutions for Somali refugees. Apart from the high rates of return expected to continue in Afghanistan and Angola, there was also optimism over prospects for voluntary repatriation in a number of other situations, including Sudan, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi.

(a) The Americas

17. Noting that the Bureau for the Americas was principally devoted to protection activities, the Director described the Bureau's five priorities: women and children, registration, partnerships, priority setting and establishing a needs-based approach. She drew attention to the

successful registration of some 18,000 Colombians in Ecuador and more than 60,000 IDPs in Colombia and emphasized the constructive, transparent and confident nature of UNHCR's relationships with governments in the region.

18. In 2004, UNHCR would commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the Cartagena Refugee Declaration. The Director also described the steps taken by the Office to prepare for possible outflows of refugees from Haiti, reiterating the call to neighbouring States not to return Haitians. With reference to the Colombia situation, the Director recognized the difficulties in identifying and assisting Colombians in border areas and welcomed the United Nations border assessment to be undertaken in Ecuador.

19. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the progress achieved in improving refugee protection in the region, including addressing the particular needs of refugee women and children. Efforts to build the capacity of governments to respond to population movements in the region were welcomed, as was the commitment to enhance UNHCR's field presence in border areas. Delegations recognized that the challenges of protecting displaced populations and preventing further displacement included income-generation activities and required United Nations coordination, international cooperation, donor community solidarity and NGO involvement. However, one delegation questioned whether UNHCR was best placed to engage in development-oriented activities.

20. There was concern about the growing number of refugees fleeing into neighbouring countries, in particular Ecuador. One delegation suggested that UNHCR should assist in reducing the backlog of asylum applications in these countries, as had been done in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Mexico. In relation to repatriation, delegations noted the importance of tripartite mechanisms and commended the positive result of the recent repatriations from Panama. The re-opening of a UNHCR office in Brazil was seen as welcome support for the development of the country's role with respect to humanitarian issues and in particular resettlement. Another delegation highlighted efforts to promote local integration and the contribution of Guatemala in adopting a decree granting long-staying refugees the right to obtain permanent resident permits.

21. Responding to questions raised, the Director explained that women represented 40 per cent of populations benefiting from self-reliance projects, thus contributing to their independence and ability to resist situations of abuse. These efforts also helped to root IDPs within their own country and avoid flight across borders. In relation to the Haiti emergency, the Director confirmed UNHCR's close working relations with the IFRC and with the Red Cross national societies, in particular in Cuba, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. On Colombia, the Director stressed the importance of creating conditions to enable not only refugees but also IDPs to return. Finally, the Director confirmed UNHCR's commitment to supporting emerging resettlement countries.

(b) Asia and the Pacific

22. The Director referred to the Bureau's strategic presentation which could serve as a "score card" against which UNHCR and States could measure progress against the objectives of the Agenda for Protection. A question about the relevance of the Office in the Asian and Pacific

region had been posed to further dialogue aimed at finding solutions to ongoing challenges. Featuring prominently were the lack of UNHCR access to persons of concern, *refoulement*, stringent immigration measures against asylum-seekers, arrest and detention, and denial of the right of return. The repatriation of Bhutanese refugees from Nepal did not take place in February as expected, on account of the conditions announced for return by Bhutan. It was the responsibility of the international community to help Nepal and Bhutan find just solutions before the refugee problem threatened regional security. In Myanmar, the Office had achieved a breakthrough in gaining access to the eastern border with Thailand. While conditions did not yet permit return, access allowed UNHCR to assist with providing basic services and infrastructure repair for a subsequent return.

23. Delegations reaffirmed UNHCR's relevance in the region and in particular its contribution to regional fora concerning complex migratory flows and its commitment to address protracted refugee situations. Capacity-building efforts were appreciated and increased burden sharing was to be sought. One delegation felt that UNHCR's comments failed to take into account the region's contribution to refugees, and its geographical diversity. Another questioned UNHCR's efforts to assist Myanmarese refugees to become self-reliant, remarking that care and maintenance could be more appropriate until refugees returned home. One delegation drew attention to the protection needs of Montagnard and North Korean asylum-seekers .

24. Regarding the Nepal-Bhutan stalemate, delegations expressed concern about the conditions of return announced on 22 December 2003; they required revision to comply with international standards. UNHCR's expertise with returnee reintegration was necessary. Further information to refugees of the Office's planned phase-out of assistance was required, as was development assistance. Delegations called on UNHCR to continue to work with Bangladesh to ensure that programmes for refugees were integrated with plans for local communities. *Refoulement* in the region was of grave concern. Results achieved with the 4Rs pilot project in Sri Lanka were impressive.

25. The observer delegation representing NGOs expressed concern over the call on UNHCR in Thailand to suspend refugee status determination. It also appealed for Acehnese to be recognized as *prima facie* refugees and not subjected to forcible repatriation. The questionable conditions of return announced last December for Bhutanese made it unlikely that refugees would choose to return. The time was opportune for an international conference to pursue comprehensive solutions. The legal and human rights implications of Australia's Pacific Solution were raised as a concern.

26. The Director thanked delegates for their useful feedback. Ninety-five percent of the refugees in Bangladesh had been repatriated successfully to Myanmar during the past decade, but there was concern that the remaining five percent could languish in camps. UNHCR was unlikely to continue providing care and maintenance assistance beyond 2005. Similarly, the Nepal-Bhutan impasse had to be overcome. Present conditions of return were inappropriate and concerned States had to work closely with the two countries to help avert a regional security crisis. In Nepal, teaming up with United Nations agencies and partner NGOs to assist refugee-hosting communities, and vigilance against sexual and gender-based violence, remained operational objectives for the Office. UNHCR's activities on the Myanmar-Thailand border did

not imply that conditions were conducive for return. In Thailand, the Office was assisting the Government to institute national procedures to address the suspension of refugee status determination.

27. In a final comment, one delegation cautioned against setting deadlines for ending UNHCR involvement in Bangladesh, and referred to the risks of involuntary returns.

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

28. The Director of CASWANAME recalled that, over the past two years, UNHCR had helped facilitate the return of some 3 million displaced Afghans, and planned to assist the return of 1 million more this year. Iraqis too were keen to go home, despite the uncertainties that awaited many on their return. In both cases, UNHCR was contributing to the initial reintegration of returning refugees and internally displaced people.

29. Elsewhere, solutions were even more difficult and political advances would have to be made if refugees were to be able to return home in safety and with dignity. The situation of the Sahrawi refugees living in camps in Algeria was one such case. UNHCR was working closely with the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to increase confidence among refugees in support of the political process. Measures included exchanges of visits between Tindouf and Layoune for the first time in a quarter of a century.

30. UNHCR had also made it a priority to enhance its knowledge of the 500,000 Palestinians living in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia who fell under UNHCR's mandate. The Director mentioned the increasing concern in North Africa about irregular migration from sub-Saharan African countries in transit to Europe. UNHCR recognized that legitimate security concerns had to be addressed, while seeking to ensure that people fleeing persecution received protection.

31. In Central Asia, UNHCR had become a partner in the EU-funded multi-year Border Management Programme. Also in Central Asia, progress had been made in establishing national asylum systems and providing refugee protection.

32. The Director emphasized operational planning procedures for this region increasingly had to be built around security considerations. With regard to many parts of Afghanistan and Iraq, international and national staff were unable to move freely and, even more worryingly, parts of both countries remained high-risk areas for returnees and refugees.

33. Several delegations noted the heavy burden of hosting refugees for long periods of time for States with limited resources, particularly in the case of Afghan and Iraqi refugees, and exhorted UNHCR not to reduce assistance. In response to a specific question on carry-over, the Director reported that as of 10 March, there was a carry-over for Iraq of USD 3.1 million and for Afghanistan one of USD 8.6 million. Many delegations welcomed the creation of UNHCR's Afghan Comprehensive Solutions Unit (ACSU); it was important not to leave Afghans "in limbo" when the Tripartite Agreement expired, but to discuss a strategy on cessation and on whether return should be promoted. A representative of the NGOs cautioned that, in

Afghanistan, “today’s refugees are tomorrow’s IDPs” and highlighted local integration as a solution. Several delegates expressed particular concern about security in the south and south-east of Afghanistan, known as the Pashtoon belt.

34. A number of delegations welcomed UNHCR’s efforts to strengthen national legal and administrative capacity and its involvement in regional dialogues on the nexus between asylum and migration. One delegation wondered to what extent the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was involved in this dialogue. Some also explicitly called on States in the region to accede to the 1951 Convention. Some delegations sought further information on refugee women and children in the region. One delegation referred to the Western Sahara confidence-building measures as a “humanitarian success story”.

35. The Director reported on UNHCR’s mainstreamed and targeted activities for refugee and returnee women, and apologized if this had not been adequately reflected in the documentation. In Afghanistan for example, UNHCR was targeting women with income-generation programmes, providing targeted assistance to female heads of household, and providing crèche facilities in Ministries in Kabul to enable returnee and other women civil servants to work in Government institutions.

(d) Europe

36. The Director of the Europe Bureau focused on the implications of the European Union expansion, noting the forthcoming completion of the first phase of the moves to harmonize European asylum systems with the adoption of two crucial directives, as well as the expansion of the Union that would transform its external borders. UNHCR had intervened repeatedly with Governments in an attempt to stimulate intensified policy discussion both on how to find durable solutions for refugee situations and on how to enhance protection in the regions of origin. The recent sharp fall in the number of asylum-seekers entering the European Union might allow space for a better focus on how protection needs and standards could best be assured.

37. In Central Europe, UNHCR was concerned to ensure that the political will of new member States to respect high asylum standards would be maintained. UNHCR had recently floated a proposal on how Europe could progress towards a common EU asylum system which would ensure that the asylum systems of new member States were not overwhelmed. The internal review of UNHCR's presence in Western and Central Europe had endorsed the continued importance of such a presence, but the Office would gradually move towards a smaller number of regional hubs to free up resources.

38. The strengthening of asylum systems beyond the borders of the EU would be a key priority for the Europe Bureau in the immediate future. UNHCR had therefore been promoting enhanced cross-border dialogue between States on both sides of the new external border of the EU, including through the Soderkjoping process. Another important forum for cross-border dialogue had been the CIS Conference Process. A High-Level Review Meeting would take place in May 2004 to review implementation of the Work Plan for Thematic Issues. In the Balkans, UNHCR would continue its efforts to operationalize still fledgling national asylum systems, while furthering sub-regional dialogue and cooperation. In the Northern Caucasus, UNHCR had

advocated a "two-pronged" approach to support the provision of additional assistance to persons returning voluntarily to Chechnya, on the understanding that a viable safe haven be maintained in Ingushetia for those not yet wishing to return.

39. Many delegations supported UNHCR's work in the Northern Caucasus and the principle of voluntariness of return to Chechnya. In this regard, one delegation urged caution in implementing the two-pronged approach, emphasizing the need to maintain protection of IDPs in Ingushetia.

40. Several delegations welcomed the rescheduled CIS Conference Process High Level Review Meeting, and one delegation urged better coordination among lead agencies and greater ownership by Western CIS countries. There was support for sub-regional approaches to legislative developments. In relation to UNHCR's role in South-Eastern Europe, several delegations supported a continuation of the search for durable solutions, including minority returns to Kosovo.

41. Some delegations welcomed UNHCR's support in building common European asylum policies, however the NGO delegation had strong reservations about several elements of the draft EU procedures directive as well as the tendency to regionalize protection in order to shift burdens.

42. Concern was expressed over the continued scaling back of humanitarian assistance in Azerbaijan, while one delegation recognized UNHCR's role in securing refugee children's attendance in public schools in Azerbaijan and the inclusion of refugees in poverty reduction strategies. One delegation welcomed the sexual and gender-based violence prevention training that the Europe Bureau had organized, and another looked forward to the results of the on-going UNHCR study of gender sensitivity in asylum procedures in 42 European countries.

43. Responding to comments on the Northern Caucasus, the Director stressed that UNHCR's main focus would continue to be on protection of the displaced and voluntary returns to Chechnya. In response to comments relating to the Balkans, the Director provided some country-specific plans and figures, stressing the need to find durable solutions for remaining caseloads. With respect to UNHCR's move towards regionalization in Western and Central Europe, the process would be gradual and in consultation with affected and donor governments. First steps would involve the creation of a regional office in Budapest, closure of the office in the Netherlands and downsizing in other Western Europe capitals.

44. In response to one delegation's question, the Director pointed out that seeking solutions for Meshketian Turks fell under UNHCR's mandate on statelessness. The Office had urged intervention where court decisions had not been implemented by local authorities, and it was clear that multifaceted solutions involving several actors were required.

(e) Africa

45. The Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa gave an overview of current refugee situations in Africa, commenting on the many opportunities for durable solutions, particularly voluntary repatriation, that had developed in Burundi, Liberia, Southern Sudan and some parts of

the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In other parts of the continent, durable peace had already enabled large groups of refugees to return, many with UNHCR's support, to Angola, Eritrea, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and to North-west Somalia. However, the Director stressed that post-conflict recovery was vital to the sustainability of return, and initiatives such as the 4Rs would play a critical role. The Director also recalled a number of protracted situations, such as in the Central African Republic, and new crises, notably the exodus of Sudanese refugees from Western Darfur currently fleeing into eastern Chad.

46. UNHCR continued to support African governments in developing their own capacity to deliver effective protection responses through, for example, local capacity building and partnership with regional institutions. The Convention Plus initiative had provided the Africa Bureau with a methodology for developing comprehensive plans of action (CPAs) for concrete refugee situations through specific agreements. UNHCR had also been developing its own capacity to identify protection needs and measure performance in this area through improved registration data and documentation for refugees. Expressing particular concern for the critical food situation affecting the lives of refugees throughout the African continent, the Director underlined the persistent challenges of improving the quality and standards of assistance and protection. Efforts to establish self-reliance initiatives were illustrated by the positive experiences in Zambia and Uganda. Resettlement also continued to be a valuable and necessary tool for both protection and durable solutions and UNHCR had pursued its efforts to ensure the integrity of the process. The Africa Bureau was continuing to work towards enhancing gender equality and women's participation in UNHCR's operations in Africa.

47. Many delegations welcomed the Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration. While recognizing the positive prospects for return on the continent, some delegations nevertheless cautioned against premature promotion of repatriation where the conditions for return were still not certain throughout the country, citing southern Sudan, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in this regard. It was suggested that challenges faced in the Angola repatriation should be taken into consideration in the Office's planning exercises for other operations.

48. The need for government ownership of the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration process was stressed by many speakers as a critical pre-requisite for the success of this process. Several delegations commended UNHCR's enhanced efforts to forge solid partnerships with key stakeholders, but several stated that UNHCR could still do more in this regard. There were repeated appeals for international support for post-conflict recovery and, in this sense, one delegation stated that the political peace process was not the end but the beginning of the process itself.

49. There was general consensus that progress made in relation to the use of standards and indicators would certainly contribute to improved needs assessment and planning. Several delegations advocated for increased needs-based budgeting, sharing the Director's concern about the sub-standard levels of assistance, particularly the dire food situation in many parts of Africa. UNHCR was encouraged to keep promoting self-reliance among refugees, and to maintain the donor community's focus on this need. Steps to mainstream the Office's policy priorities on

women and children were welcomed, but needed to be pursued, in particular as regards women's participation, setting up of confidential reporting systems and effective support mechanisms for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

50. One delegation expressed concern about the IDP situation in several parts of the continent and the lack of effective responses, and encouraged other governments to join forces on drawing up policy on IDPs and on calling for an international commitment to address trafficking in small arms in Africa.

51. Funding shortfalls in Africa were acknowledged and several delegations appealed for increased responsibility sharing. The NGO delegation regretted that recent initiatives taken by countries of asylum, such as the promotion of refugee status determination in regions of origin, and readmission agreements or proposals to establish transit centres in regions of origin had resulted in burden shifting rather than responsibility sharing. The European Commission launched the idea of creating an "Africa Capacity Initiative" to be managed by the African Union, and expressed its readiness to provide financial and logistical support to this end.

52. In response to interventions, the Director pledged full commitment to seeking solutions to the critical food shortages together with WFP and governments concerned. On the use of standards and indicators, he reconfirmed his earlier comment that the impact would be reflected in the 2005 COPs. The Director concurred that there was a need to move from care and maintenance programmes to self-reliance initiatives and pointed to the need for countries of asylum to regard refugees as a potential contribution to their national well-being. On the question of UNHCR's role on IDPs, the Director acknowledged the need for a more focused programme and mentioned specific interventions in support of IDPs in Liberia, as well as community-based project activities in the repatriation operations plans for Angola, Burundi and southern Sudan.

53. On the Zambia initiative, the Director pointed out that refugee beneficiaries had not indicated their desire to return immediately and both refugees and Zambians had indicated the need for the programme to continue. The uniqueness of this initiative was that it was community-based and evolving. UNHCR would review the focus of the initiative if required. As regards the proposed Somalia CPA, the Director underlined that the programme provided a good opportunity to enhance support for Somalia, which had not received sufficient attention from the international community and continued to be the source of secondary flows. UNHCR also saw an opportunity to build international awareness on the primary causes of displacement.

(f) Global programmes and partnerships

54. The Director of the Division of Operational Support introduced the sub-item on global programmes, basing her presentation on five main themes: action being taken to improve the quality of programmes, notably the recent production of a *Practical Guide to the Systematic Use of Standards & Indicators in UNHCR Operations*; latest developments on registration, including the new *Registration Handbook* and the work being undertaken to develop a new database system under Project Profile; new approaches to mainstreaming and reinforcing ownership of policies on gender, refugee women and refugee children, following the decision to consolidate responses to the evaluations undertaken in recent years on refugee women, children and

community services; enhanced efforts in HIV/AIDS work with refugee populations, through strengthened partnerships with national entities and with UNAIDS; intensified collaboration with bilateral agencies, such as Swiss Humanitarian Aid and RedR-Australia, and with United Nations Volunteers, whose valuable expertise enhanced the quality of UNHCR's programmes in many areas.

55. Several delegations commended the work achieved on the use of standards and indicators and asked to be kept informed of progress in implementing this measurement process and on training staff. The ongoing development of new partnerships in different areas was also welcomed by delegations, notably the proposal for co-sponsorship of UNAIDS; UNHCR's membership in the UNDG; efforts to promote sustainable reintegration for returnees and IDPs; and collaboration with other United Nations agencies and NGOs on education in emergencies, with particular focus on improving enrolment and attendance of girls.

56. In response to several enquiries, the Director outlined the different phases of development and introduction of the practical guide on standards and indicators, which had drawn in part on UNHCR's involvement in the Sphere Project. She hoped that this tool would enable the Office to give a global picture of the different sectors concerned and cited the High Commissioner's Five Commitments to Refugee Women as one area of focus. On registration, she confirmed that the outcome of the Tanzanian fingerprinting experiment had been positive, and in response to queries regarding the choice of the 20 target countries for the Project Profile roll out, the Director informed delegations that they included most of the larger refugee populations, covering almost seven million refugees.

57. Responding to an earlier query from one delegation concerning the availability of counseling for mental health problems amongst refugees, she regretted that there was little focus on this at present, but said that at field level, NGO partners were covering this.

58. Finally, in acknowledging one delegation's continuing reservations concerning the consolidation of the women, children and community services functions into one unit, the Director asked that the new process be given a chance. One objective was to promote wider ownership of the issues involved as well as to build management accountability. Outstanding work had been done in updating community services manuals and in training staff.

(g) Emergency response and preparedness

59. The Head of the Emergency and Security Service presented EC/54/SC/CRP.4. He commented that following changes in the operational environment, UNHCR had reinforced its work in the area of early warning. In close cooperation with other United Nations agencies, the Office was developing an information network whose focus would be not only to monitor deteriorating situations but also to identify opportunities to promote the peace and stability process, particularly as regards repatriation.

60. There was general appreciation of the work undertaken, with emphasis on emergency preparedness and the importance of improving 'on the ground' security assessments. A question was raised as to whether UNHCR had sufficient funding and staff to undertake the plans

formulated. There was a request for more information on emergency procedures, and particularly on the process for declaring an emergency. Inter-agency collaboration was encouraged, notably the sharing of early warning analysis.

61. In response, the Head of ESS explained that the early warning system would place strong emphasis on the concrete aspects of preparedness, ensuring real time assessments and action checklists, and would identify trigger points for initiating preparedness measures to ensure an effective and early response. An effective early warning mechanism would also lead to timely contingency planning and to inter-agency planning initiatives, as for Iraq, and more recently for West Africa and the Great Lakes. These initiatives not only helped UNHCR to ensure readiness in case of an emergency as in Chad, but also to prepare for a potential repatriation as in Sudan and Burundi where UNHCR had fielded emergency response teams. UNHCR was also working on a new 'emergency and security management initiative' (ESMI) that would attempt to look at issues such as funding, staff capacity and resource issues to ensure adequate preparedness in an emergency. There was also a move towards closer interaction with various inter-agency standing committee groups. Finally the Head of ESS spoke of the new website that would be a forum for interaction with the Emergency and Security Service (ESS) including an entry point for possible suggestions on how to strengthen the service.

V. MANAGEMENT, FINANCE, OVERSIGHT AND HUMAN RESOURCES

62. The Controller gave an update on the progress made by UNHCR in follow-up to the recommendations contained in the 2002 United Nations Board of Auditors' Report and drew delegations' attention to the progress report in matrix form which had been made available at the back of the room. By the end of the year, UNHCR would have implemented 24 out of 34 recommendations. The remaining 10 recommendations were being addressed. Some of them could only be implemented when the new management information system had been "rolled out" to the field. Other recommendations were system-wide and UNHCR would need to coordinate with other agencies and submit a report to this year's General Assembly.

63. Several delegations were concerned by the failure of some of UNHCR's implementing partners to report on time or well and considered UNHCR should actively seek to improve such reporting. One delegation asked if UNHCR was still funding the Refugee Education Trust. Another delegation appreciated UNHCR's efforts to implement the recommendations, but was concerned about the speed with which they were being addressed and remained concerned about the auditors' findings on issues of accountability, financial control and asset management.

VI. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

64. In her oral update on implementation of the Agenda for Protection, the Director of the Department of International Protection (DIP) referred to the latest developments on disseminating the key messages contained in the Agenda, including the publication of additional language versions of the pocket version of the Agenda and the joint IPU/UNHCR Handbook for Parliamentarians on international refugee law. Globally, the Director outlined three areas of implementation: field operations, intergovernmental efforts, and 'tools development', notably through the Convention Plus initiative. In the field, UNHCR had given training workshops to improve protection delivery and strengthen accountability of managers. In respect of the

intergovernmental process, the Agenda had provided a platform for the adoption of a number of important conclusions, various guidelines and publication of background papers for the Global Consultations second track legal discussions. The survey on steps being taken by States to reduce statelessness would be made available to the Committee in June. The Director gave particular focus to UNHCR's partnerships with others, recalling that the Agenda had been designed as a common strategy, not just for UNHCR's activities, but also for States and NGOs, and she looked forward to receiving reports from States on their own follow-up efforts.

65. In their interventions, speakers expressed appreciation for the comprehensive overview of developments. One delegation queried whether the discontinuation of the post of focal point for women and children within DIP would hinder follow-up of Goal 6 of the Agenda. Another recommended that the schedule for implementation of the Agenda should in future reflect concrete developments in operations. Referring to a retreat held with UNHCR, the NGO speaker welcomed the recognition of the complementary and mutually reinforcing nature of actions by the Office and NGOs in the field of protection; NGOs looked forward to developing further the plan of action devised on that occasion.

66. Commenting on the interventions, the Director noted that the post of focal point for women and children had been discontinued not only for budgetary considerations, but also because the level was not commensurate with the authority and responsibilities required. DIP would transfer these functions within the Department to a suitably senior post. The Director was confident that a gender equality perspective had been mainstreamed in training programmes and noted that, in addition, the programmes encouraged staff to adopt a child's rights perspective. The 2004 Note on International Protection would be structured with reference to the Agenda and to bring specific operational responses to the Committee's attention. She undertook to explore how the planning matrix might be expanded, while keeping it simple and understandable.

VII. PROTECTION/PROGRAMME POLICY

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

67. Introducing the conference room paper EC/54/SC/CRP.5 entitled Economic and Social Impact of Refugee Populations on Host Developing Countries as well as Other Countries, the Director of the Division of Operational Support referred to several country-specific studies that acknowledged both negative and positive impacts of massive refugee populations on the socio-economic landscape of hosting countries. She emphasized the importance of the implementation of the Framework for Durable Solutions, particularly its Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) and Development through Local Integration (DLI) approaches, in advocating for additional development assistance to support, in particular, countries hosting large populations of refugees, with a view to promoting the productive capacity of refugees and the development of refugee-hosting areas to benefit refugees and host communities.

68. Some delegations encouraged UNHCR to continue to carry out studies on the socio-economic impact of refugees and suggested to undertake more work on quantifying the contributions of host developing countries. One delegation drew attention to the large disparity

in the level of social services between the refugee-designated areas and surrounding villages. It was often the case that, with the repatriation of refugees, relief agencies also departed, leaving the host community with no social services.

69. One delegation expressed concern over the disparity between the burden shouldered by some regions and the amount of assistance provided to them. Another delegation proposed that security issues, in particular in relation to the presence of small arms, should be included among measures to address the socio-economic impact of the presence of refugees. Some delegations urged UNHCR to undertake more work on the rehabilitation of the environment in light of the enormous damage that could be sustained due to the presence of large numbers of refugees.

70. A number of delegations expressed their support for the implementation of the Framework for Durable Solutions and encouraged UNHCR to build on the findings and experiences gained from the Uganda Self-Reliance Strategy and the Zambia Initiative. Some delegations called for a more systematic way to incorporate refugee needs into transitional and recovery plans and underlined the importance of strengthening cooperation with development agencies. Several welcomed UNHCR's membership in the UNDG as an important step in promoting durable solutions for people of concern to the Office.

71. One delegation informed that they had recently begun a process of ensuring that refugee issues were increasingly taken into account in their development assistance programmes. This delegation stressed the need for host countries also to give priority to refugees and refugee-hosting areas in their National Development Planning.

72. The Director reiterated the commitment of UNHCR to continue to forge partnerships with development actors in support of the Framework for Durable Solutions. She commended some donors for the inclusion of refugees in their development cooperation programmes and encouraged recipient countries to give priority to refugees and refugee hosting communities in their national development plans. With regard to suggestions for further work on the quantification of host country contributions, she stressed the limited financial and human resources of UNHCR to undertake such work. She suggested that Executive Committee members meet informally to define other avenues for exploring these issues, including the possibility of engaging the services of a research institute.

VIII. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE STAFF COUNCIL

73. The Chairman of the Staff Council welcomed the substantial progress that had been made in many areas of human resources management, security and staff welfare. The key now was the implementation of these new policies. The Chairman described two of the great strengths of UNHCR as its ability to be beside the population it was mandated to protect and assist, and its ability to mobilize staff, equipment and assistance quickly. Crucial to this capacity were the need to have a legitimate security system in place, a strong independent telecommunications system, a self-sufficient supply management system, effective support mechanisms for staff and reliable human resources mechanisms. In many of these areas, the Staff Council felt it was necessary for UNHCR to complement rather than simply rely on United Nations common systems.

IX. GOVERNANCE

74. At the suggestion of the Chairman, the Committee agreed to revert to the question of the annual theme at the June Standing Committee meeting.

75. 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-eighth session of the General Assembly. They included the “Omnibus” resolution endorsing the report of the fifty-fourth session of the Executive Committee (A/RES/58/151); the “UNHCR 2004” resolution (A/RES/58/153); a resolution on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/RES/58/149); a resolution for the enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/RES/58/152); a resolution on the follow-up to the Regional Conference to Address the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Other Forms of Involuntary Displacement and Returnees in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Relevant Neighbouring States (A/RES/58/154); and, a resolution on mobilizing assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors (A/RES/58/150).

X. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

76. The Chairman also reported on the process of consulting Executive Committee members on measures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Executive Committee and its Standing Committee, including NGO participation. Further consultations would be held on these subjects. Vice-Chairman Chiaradia would preside over a consultation on the issue of staff safety and security, which was requested at the time of the Planning Meeting, and had also agreed to preside over a consultation on the 2005 Budget.

77. The Chairman then declared the closure of the Standing Committee’s twenty-ninth meeting.

Decision on programmes, budgets and funding in 2004

The Standing Committee,

Recalling the Executive Committee's decision at its fifty-fourth session on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/979, para. 23) as well as its discussions under the programme and funding item at the twenty-sixth meeting of the Standing Committee;

Recalling also, with appreciation, the burden shouldered by developing countries hosting refugees,

1. *Notes* that UNHCR's overall needs under its Annual Programme for 2004, based on currently known requirements, amount to US\$ 954.9 million, as approved by the Executive Committee at its fifty-fourth session (which includes the amount of \$25 million from the United Nations Regular Budget, \$7 million for Junior Professional Officers, and up to \$50 million for Part B of the Operational Reserve);
2. *Notes* that Supplementary Programme budgets established since the approval of the Annual Programme, currently amount to \$81 million;
3. *Recognizes* that emergencies unfolding during 2004 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;
4. *Welcomes* progress by UNHCR in implementing the recommendations in the 2002 United Nations Board of Auditors' Report and urges UNHCR to improve its efficiency and accountability through ongoing implementation of these recommendations and to report on progress at each Standing Committee meeting in 2004;
5. *Reaffirms* its continued support for efforts by the High Commissioner to seek innovative approaches to funding UNHCR's budget, notes the pilot implementation of the voluntary 30 per cent Base Level Approach, and appreciates being kept regularly informed of the progress made on the latter;
6. *Notes* with concern that the High Commissioner has been compelled to reduce the activities under the Annual Programme for 2004 as a result of anticipated funding shortfalls and emphasizes the importance of adequate and flexible funding by the international community for UNHCR's programmes; and,
7. *Notes* with interest the progress achieved on the High Commissioner's proposal, approved by the Executive Committee on a trial basis for one year (A/AC.96/987, paragraph 24 (b)), to establish a part B to the Operational Reserve, and requests to be kept regularly informed, including at each Standing Committee, of further developments during the trial period, in anticipation of the High Commissioner's recommendations on this subject to the fifty-fifth session of the Executive Committee.

List of points for follow-up action

1. Information on budgetary issues, including the effect of fluctuations in the exchange rate of the US dollar to the 2003 budget and details of the operation of the Operational Reserve;
2. Information on follow-up to the Executive Committee request to review administrative costs;
3. Information on the role of the Inspector General's Office;
4. Advice on whether UNHCR continues to fund the Refugee Education Trust;
5. Theme for Executive Committee General Debate.