



# Security Council

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### **BRIEFING SECURITY COUNCIL, HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES SAYS SITUATIONS**

### **IN IRAQ, SOMALIA KEY TO RISING NUMBERS OF DISPLACED PERSONS WORLDWIDE**

The number of refugees worldwide had increased to more than 11 million over the last two years, and the number of people displaced internally as a result of conflict to some 22 million, António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said in a briefing to the Security Council today.

He said the increase in the number of refugees under the mandate of his Office — not including the 4.6 million Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — had increased primarily due to the situations in Iraq and Somalia. Other sources of the growing number of refugees included Afghanistan, Sudan, Chad, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Other causes of displacement besides conflict included climate change induced natural disaster, drought, rising sea levels and the current global economic recession, he said. “Conflict, climate change and extreme deprivation will interrelate, strengthening each other as causes of displacement.” As there was no legal framework addressing the situation of people displaced internally by persecution or armed conflict, there was a need to discuss seriously the new forms of forced displacement, emerging protection gaps and possible forms of collective response.

He said there were three challenges for the international community in responding to humanitarian crisis: peacekeeping in situations where there was no peace to keep; the concurrent need to ensure staff security and deliver humanitarian protection and assistance; and preserving humanitarian space in the context of an integrated United Nations presence.

Peacebuilding missions mandated by the Council had facilitated the work of UNHCR, most notably by supporting the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons, he said. However, those processes had often been obstructed by a failure to resolve outstanding land and property issues. The most effective means to address the question of forced displacement was prevention, the most important element of the “responsibility to protect” concept.

In the ensuing debate, Council members stressed that UNHCR’s work was an essential element of the collective effort to maintain international peace and security, and called for more frequent and regular briefings by the High Commissioner, including country-specific briefings. The phenomenon of displacement was becoming increasingly complex and no single measure could address such complexity. However, conflict prevention was one of the most effective and cheapest ways to reduce displacement.

Council members also called for better protection in camps for refugee and displaced persons, where the recruitment of children for sexual and other violence was rampant. Viet Nam’s representative said the increasing victimization of displaced women and children in conflict zones was of particular concern. Some speakers underlined the importance of humanitarian access, citing the

current situation in the Gaza Strip as a prime example of civilians trapped in an armed conflict situation.

Several speakers addressed the distinction between UNHCR helping refugees and being involved with internally displaced persons. The representative of the Russian Federation noted in that regard that providing assistance to refugees lay within UNHCR's mandate and was regulated by international refugee law. However, interventions on behalf of internally displaced persons were only allowed if the relevant country had made a request in advance. Providing assistance to internally displaced persons was primarily the responsibility of the country concerned.

Uganda's representative pointed out, however, that, although internal displacement was the responsibility of sovereign States, in some situations -- as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was active -- the State was not in a situation to act. The question was what the international community could do in such situations. The concept of "responsibility to protect" had been endorsed by the 2005 World Summit, but nothing had been done to formalize it. It was high time the Council took the lead in figuring out how that principle could be put into practice.

France's representative said in that regard that the international community must intervene when national authorities could not protect their people, and it was therefore important to implement the concept of responsibility to protect. Five million refugees had spent more than five years outside their homelands, and such prolonged displacement was often linked to failures to resolve armed conflicts and human rights violations. The situation of the Palestinians was an example of the lack of a political settlement.

Also speaking today were the representatives of Costa Rica, Turkey, Japan, United Kingdom, Burkina Faso, United States, Austria, Mexico, Croatia, China and Libya.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 12:45 p.m.

#### Background

The Security Council met this morning to hear a briefing by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

#### Briefing

ANTÓNIO MANUEL DE OLIVEIRA GUTERRES, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, informed the Council that, since his briefing in January 2006, there had been a significant increase in refugee numbers, primarily due to the situations in Iraq and Somalia. The current number of refugees under the mandate of his Office exceeded 11 million, not including the 4.6 million Palestinians for whom the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was responsible. The number of conflict-induced internally displaced persons had grown to some 26 million worldwide. UNHCR was working, in collaboration with the broader humanitarian community, to support States in providing the internally displaced with protection, assistance and solutions. Another issue was Stateless people, of which there might be some 12 million.

One group of conflicts extended from South Asia, through the Middle East to the Sudan and Chad, and into the Horn of Africa, he said. Although each crisis was distinct, they were increasingly interrelated and together had major implications for global peace and security. Those conflicts had generated around two thirds of the total number of refugees and required a strong humanitarian response. However, the limitations of humanitarian action and its inability to resolve deep-rooted conflicts within and between States must be acknowledged. The solution could only be political, something to which the United Nations could make a crucial contribution.

He said 278,000 refugees had returned to Afghanistan, mainly from Pakistan. Those returns were in no way due to a meaningful improvement of the situation in Afghanistan, but mostly to

growing insecurity in areas adjacent to neighbouring Pakistan and because of declining living standards in urban centres. Three million Afghans remained in exile in Pakistan and Iran. There were now also some 300,000 people displaced in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and Federally Administered Tribal Areas, to whom, as in Afghanistan, UNHCR had very limited access. The Afghan situation could, therefore, not be addressed in isolation. The Agency and the Government of Afghanistan had organized an international conference two months ago to consolidate a comprehensive strategy for sustainable return and reintegration. The success of the conference would depend on a resolute follow-up process by all stakeholders.

In Iraq, UNHCR was working hard to help the Government create appropriate conditions for the voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of refugees and the internally displaced, he said. Two million Iraqis were hosted mainly by Jordan and Syria, and a similar number remained displaced inside their own country. UNHCR called on the more prosperous States to offer full support to countries and organizations bearing the brunt of the Iraqi exodus. To prepare for returns, UNHCR had redeployed its representative for Iraq from Amman to Baghdad and established an international presence in Erbil, Mosul and Basra. Beyond security, sustainable return to Iraq would require effective action in the areas of property restitution or compensation, and full and equitable access to welfare services and public distribution systems.

Turning to Darfur, he said an appalling humanitarian and human rights disaster persisted in that war-torn western region of the Sudan. More than 2 million people remained displaced internally, and nearly a quarter of a million Sudanese had sought refuge in neighbouring Chad. Without a political agreement, there was a risk that the United Nations-African Union Mission would be unable to meet the security expectations of the affected populations. Even if a comprehensive peace agreement could be established, the international force strengthened and impunity ended, massive investment would be needed to re-establish the area's social, economic and environmental equilibrium, ensure harmony between different groups, and overcome the tensions created by dwindling water resources and high population growth.

With more than a million Somalis already dependent on food aid, he said, any further limitation on humanitarian access in that country could lead to additional population displacements of a daunting magnitude. The burden placed on neighbouring States, including Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti, was already enormous. As for Gaza, UNHCR had no presence there, but its civilian population was not even allowed to flee to safety elsewhere. UNHCR expressed its firm solidarity with UNRWA and called for strict adherence to humanitarian principles in and around Gaza, including respect for the universal right to seek and enjoy asylum.

Another group of inter-related conflicts had been multiplying and deepening, he warned, adding that they did not draw international attention because their impact was local or regional. Some 100,000 refugees had been forced to flee from the Central African Republic to Chad and Cameroon, and more than 200,000 citizens were internally displaced. As for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the number of people who died unnecessarily every six months as a result of the armed conflict in that country was equivalent to the number of those killed by the 2004 Asian tsunami. Only the Council had the legitimacy to lead international efforts to resolve that situation. UNHCR was prepared to play its part within its limited role and capacities.

Natural disasters resulting from climate change had become more frequent and intense, reinforcing the potential for displacement, he said. The same applied to drought and the rising sea levels. In addition, because of the current economic recession, it seemed inevitable that more and more people would be on the move. "Conflict, climate change and extreme deprivation will inter-relate, strengthening each other as a cause of displacement." There was no legal framework for people displaced by persecution or armed conflict. There was, therefore, a duty to discuss seriously the new forms of forced displacement, emerging protection gaps and possible forms of collective response.

He said there were three challenges for the international community in responding to humanitarian crisis. The first challenge was peacekeeping in situations where there was no peace to keep. In such situations, civilian-protection mandates must be sufficiently clear and strong while enjoying appropriate levels of political and material support. A second challenge was posed by the concurrent need to ensure staff security and deliver humanitarian protection and assistance. Ensuring

staff safety must be a top priority of every humanitarian organization and the United Nations as a whole. That was non-negotiable, as the deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers had increased.

The third challenge was preserving humanitarian space in the context of an integrated United Nations presence, he said. Once a peace consolidation process was under way, an integrated process could provide an effective framework for collaboration between humanitarian agencies and the political and security components of the United Nations system. But where conflict was still ongoing, there must be a balance between ensuring a coherent approach across the United Nations system and preserving the autonomy and neutrality of humanitarian action. That was particularly crucial in situations where humanitarian agencies were operating in highly politicized and militarized environments.

He said the peacebuilding missions mandated by the Council had facilitated the work of his Office, most notably by supporting the voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons. The scale of return and the success of reintegration were two of the most tangible indicators of progress in peacebuilding processes. Those processes, however, had often been obstructed by a failure to resolve outstanding land and property issues. A collaborative approach to those challenges was crucial. The Peacebuilding Commission's experience in Burundi was particularly relevant.

Underscoring the importance of involving refugees and internally displaced persons in peace processes, he said they could provide critical perspectives on the causes of conflict and contribute to a sense of shared ownership in peacemaking and peacebuilding. The engagement of women was of particular importance. UNHCR had recently facilitated the participation in peace discussions of Sudanese refugees living in Chad.

Preventive activities were the most effective means to address the question of forced displacement, he said, pointing out that prevention was the most important element of the responsibility to protect. Effective prevention would require a carefully balanced, coordinated and targeted combination of measures in the political, diplomatic, developmental, environmental and humanitarian domains. It would require action by a wide range of different stakeholders as well as new networks and coalitions.

### Statements

JORGE URBINA ( Costa Rica), stating that the UNHCR briefing should become common practice, stressed that the Council's consideration of specific circumstances should not keep it from addressing other issues and considering ways in which it could enhance its support. Forced displacement was becoming increasingly complex; indeed, the situation in Gaza was a prime example of how people trapped by conflict, or forced to flee their homes, required effective responses and sustainable solutions. The same was true in Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa and many other places where displaced people were twice victimized -- first by the actions of others and then by the international community's failure to effectively address the challenges they faced.

He said the question of refugees and internally displaced persons must be placed in the ambit of broader consideration of international efforts to protect civilians, especially in post-conflict activities and peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. The international community must stress the importance of permitting access to those seeking asylum and refuge, as well as the need for enhanced early-warning mechanisms. There must also be more cooperation between the Security Council and United Nations agencies dealing with refugees and displaced persons.

Noting his country's growing concern about the sharp rise in violence against refugees and displaced persons -- especially those sheltered in and around refugee camps -- and the forced recruitment of children, he stressed the need for strong civilian-protection mandates in peacekeeping operations, especially those in complex war zones such as Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was also important to ensure more cooperation between the Council and humanitarian organizations.

BAKI İLKIN ([Turkey](#)) said the work of UNHCR was an essential element of the collective effort to maintain international peace and security. It was, therefore, unfortunate that the current security environment and evolving security challenges of the day made it difficult to reduce the number of refugees, which had risen dramatically in recent years. Indeed, that sharp rise had itself become a security problem; there were now more than 67 million people worldwide who had been forcibly displaced from their homes or regions. That in turn increased the challenges confronting the countries involved and UNHCR. With that in mind, it was clear that no single individual or organization could cope with “a problem of this magnitude”. While UNHCR was playing a leading role, international cooperation and solidarity was an imperative. UNHCR deserved the support of all stakeholders, including the Security Council, which should consider ways in which it could bolster its support for the Agency.

He said his country was very committed to promoting and ensuring such support, not merely as a humanitarian imperative, but because of the “hard core reality” surrounding Turkey, especially its close proximity to areas of conflict in the Middle East, Balkan and Caucasus regions. Those areas were producing high numbers of refugees in and around Turkey. As a result, the Turkish people had, throughout history, always welcomed, extended a helping hand and provided safe haven to people who had fled oppression and violence, including, in the recent past, those fleeing wars in the Balkans and an oppressive regime in Iraq. Turkey had provided shelter and protection to more than half a million Iraqis in the first Gulf War. Today, despite real improvements in the security situation, the refugee problem remained serious and required international action and support.

Applauding UNHCR’s work and pledging his country’s continued support for the Agency, he said Turkey also appreciated the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in Gaza. It was vitally important to ensure that UNHCR was properly resourced. Indeed, reliability and continuity in donor contributions constituted a major part of the broader effort to address refugee issues. Without such commitment, the international community could not expect organizations like UNHCR to deliver what was expected of them.

YUKIO TAKASU ([Japan](#)) said the tragic phenomenon of displacement was growing increasingly complex, as more and more people were forced to move not only because of conflict, but also by natural disasters, environmental degradation and extreme poverty. Japan was all too aware also of the negative impacts that climate change and the global food crisis were having on displaced populations. “We need to address the root causes so that the number of displaced persons does not continue to swell.”

While no single measure could address such a complex issue, conflict prevention was one of the most effective ways to reduce displacement, he said. Peacebuilding efforts to prevent the recurrence of conflict were, therefore, indispensable to addressing protracted refugee situations, and the reintegration of displaced persons should be accorded a higher priority as integrated peacebuilding strategies were designed and implemented.

Protection for those forced to flee their homes was, naturally, the most urgently needed first step, he continued. At the same time, however, in order to achieve a durable solution, it was necessary not only to protect, but also to empower internally displaced persons. Assistance for return and reintegration, such as vocational training and education for refugee children, was essential.

Expressing serious concern about rising casualties among humanitarian personnel and the increased targeting of relief workers, he said such attacks were unacceptable. Japan called upon all parties concerned to take action to secure humanitarian space, while respecting fully the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance. Hopefully, the recent study jointly commissioned by UNHCR and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on the implementation of Security Council civilian-protection mandates would analyze that issue in depth.

KAREN PIERCE ([United Kingdom](#)), echoing the High Commissioner’s admiration for UNRWA’s workers in the Gaza Strip, called for immediate humanitarian access in light of the immense suffering caused by the escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel. The United Kingdom called for an immediate ceasefire and condemned acts of terror and violence against civilians.

Pointing out that the majority of people affected by violence did not cross international borders, she expressed strong support for the High Commissioner's approach to internally displaced persons, encouraging him to see what could be done, in cooperation with humanitarian partners, to enhance the cluster approach. As for the changing causes of forced displacement, the current protection framework was adequate if implemented properly.

Council members did not yet have a unified view on the concept of responsibility to protect, she said, adding that Governments should be helped in discharging their responsibility to protect civilians. The United Kingdom would welcome more regular and ad hoc briefings by the High Commissioner, and the Council should make greater use of UNHCR expertise in formulating mandates. There had been a debate within the United Nations and the international community about whether refugees should be encouraged to return only to their own places of origin, or whether they should be encouraged to go to other places. The United Kingdom needed more information on that discussion.

LE LUONG MINH ( Viet Nam) welcomed the progress that UNHCR had made in the areas of integration and resettlement of refugees. At the same time, Viet Nam was seriously concerned by the increasing numbers of displaced persons and refugees worldwide, especially in conflict areas, and by the increasing difficulty of assisting them and comprehensively addressing the complex challenges they faced. Of particular concern was the increasing victimization of displaced women and children in conflict zones. The current situation in Gaza was a prime example of civilians trapped in an armed conflict situation. In such circumstances, quick and comprehensive action and cooperation among all stakeholders were necessary to alleviate suffering and prevent dire humanitarian consequences.

The United Nations and the wider international community must also step up all efforts to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers and other persons dispatched to protect refugee and displaced populations, he said. It was also necessary to increase support for humanitarian organizations. In addition, ensuring comprehensive plans for repatriation and reintegration should include cooperation among, and input from, not only the relevant United Nations agencies, but from international financial institutions and non-governmental organizations as well. Such broad cooperation and action would more effectively contribute to the stabilization process.

ROBERT TIENDRÉBÉOGO ( Burkina Faso) said life in refugee camps was often unbearable owing to overpopulation, extreme poverty and repeated rights violations. The militarization of refugee camps, growing sexual violence and forced recruitment of children were unacceptable. The tragedy of refugees required the Council's special attention, specifically when adopting mandates for peacekeeping operations.

He said there was a need to ensure that refugee staff had appropriate training, while it was incumbent upon States and other parties to conflict to protect civilians, including refugees and internally displaced persons. They must create conditions conducive to protecting their rights, including by establishing conditions for lasting peace and the rule of law, and by promoting preventive diplomacy.

Unfortunately, most countries with internally displaced persons and refugee problems needed support, he said, urging regional organizations to complement collective action in that regard so as to ensure an integrated dynamic. Africa had the largest numbers of refugees and displaced persons, which was mostly seen as a challenge of development. The African Union was preparing a convention on the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, which would be a milestone for the continent.

VANCE MACMAHAN ( United States) agreed with other speakers that UNHCR's work was becoming increasingly dangerous, especially as the numbers of displaced persons continued to rise and the challenges they faced became ever more complex. The upsurge in those numbers had important implications for UNHCR as well as the wider United Nations and international community. For its own part, the United States was seriously concerned that displaced populations and the relief workers dispatched to protect them were increasingly becoming targets of violence. The international community must shoulder its responsibility to protect all those whose lives or freedoms were threatened by civil and other conflicts.

He said his country was also seriously concerned about the ongoing and widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated against refugees and displaced persons in conflict zones and elsewhere. Indeed, such violence was a significant and complex challenge that was all too often ignored. The United States called on all Member States to take serious, concrete steps to redress that injustice by integrating programmes to counter gender-based violence into all civilian-protection efforts, among other means.

Expressing his country's strong support for United Nations and international efforts to secure a dramatic increase in all aspects of women's participation in the security and peacebuilding fields, he said that, while there had been some progress, more should be done to ensure an increase in the number of women in leadership roles. It was clear that the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons could be met most effectively when Member States evinced the political will to make existing systems operate efficiently and effectively. That could be accomplished by bolstering support for assistance programmes and avoiding duplication.

Finally, he urged the Council to remain focused on the urgency of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. While the United States delegation appreciated Israel's initiative to open a humanitarian corridor into the enclave, its people needed access to a lifeline for food, basic supplies and medicines.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING ( Austria) said there was a strong nexus between peace and security on the one hand, and refugees and internally displaced persons on the other. More frequent and regular briefings by the High Commissioner, including country-specific briefings, would be extremely useful. An accumulation of adverse trends and causes of displacement included competition for scarce resources, poverty, conflict and climate change. Given its impact on human security, the security of States and its role as a major cause of migration and displacement, the Human Security Network was identifying the implications of climate change for human security. Austria welcomed the initiative to organize an open Council debate in April to examine the relationship between energy, security and climate change.

He said the safe and voluntary return of displaced populations played a crucial role in peacebuilding efforts. Related activities should, therefore, take into consideration the specific needs of displaced populations and of receiving communities. Regional protection programmes could be of particular importance and capacity-building in regions of origin needed to be advanced. What lessons could be learned from UNHCR's experiences in ensuring the sustainability of refugee returns? Austria welcomed an initiative by the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons to prepare a draft guide for mediators on integrating internal displacement issues into peace processes and peace agreements. What lessons could UNHCR share from the implementation of its gender policy and its efforts to involve women in all aspects of its work?

CLAUDE HELLER ( Mexico) agreed with others that the Council should consider regularly the situation of refugees so that it might be better informed about such issues and review strategies under way in the wider Organization to address them. Indeed, it might be necessary for the Council to hear from the head of UNHCR and other key agencies at least twice a year. The current parallel emergencies concerning the prices of food and fuel, climate change and the economic and financial crisis would certainly have an impact on the numbers of displaced persons worldwide.

Expressing concern about continuing forcible displacement and the lack of a clear strategy to address the challenges faced by the displaced, he called for forceful mandates and measures to protect people driven from their homes by conflict. At the same time, it was necessary to enact strong measures to protect humanitarian workers and local staff working to protect refugees and displaced persons. UNHCR should not be looked upon as a separate entity, but as an integral part of the wider Organization's work. Indeed, there would be no way comprehensively to address the situation in Gaza without hearing the views of the relevant United Nations agencies on the question of displacement.

ILYA I. ROGACHEV ( Russian Federation) said the issues of ensuring security and addressing displacement in compliance with international refugee law were interdependent. Any

efforts to address forced displacement should complement overall peacebuilding efforts. In that regard, it was important to ensure coordination between UNHCR and Governments.

He said conflict was the primary reason for displacement and Iraq had the lead in that regard. The problem of Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons must be addressed immediately, because of the heavy burden they imposed on host countries, Syria in particular. As for Palestinian refugees, UNHCR should cooperate more closely with UNRWA, especially in cases where there was a new flow of refugees.

Underlining the necessity of drawing a distinction between UNHCR providing assistance to refugees and to internally displaced persons, he noted that, for the latter group, interventions were only allowed if the relevant country had made a request in advance. Providing assistance to internally displaced persons was primarily the responsibility of the country concerned. UNHCR should prepare plans for situations where voluntary return was not possible, including plans to host them in countries other than the host country. There was an urgent need to ensure the security of refugee camps, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic and Darfur. The Russian Federation, therefore, called on UNHCR to prioritize the demilitarization of camps and the separation of combatants from civilians.

RANKO VILOVIĆ ( [Croatia](#) ) said that, given the fundamental links between peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and civilian protection, his delegation was very concerned to hear that the numbers of refugees and displaced persons were on the rise. There could be no solution to the challenges posed by such increases without the political commitment of all stakeholders. New and emerging causes of forced displacement should not be overlooked in the future work of the Council, which must underscore the importance of ensuring the physical safety and security of refugees, internally displaced persons and humanitarian workers.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, he voiced the hope that all parties would adhere to the agreement to open a humanitarian corridor to help the civilians and displaced persons. Croatia also hoped today's briefing would serve as a model for future meetings, especially when the Council considered establishing and renewing complex and multidimensional peacekeeping mandates. In addition to existing global instruments dealing with refugees and displaced persons, it was to be hoped that the African Union's draft convention on internally displaced persons would be adopted and brought into operation soon, thus providing further help in addressing the situation on the continent.

ZHANG DAN ( [China](#) ) said that, during the past year, UNHCR had achieved positive progress in refugee protection, local integration and resettlement. While appreciating that progress, however, China had noticed that the number of refugees worldwide had grown by some 11.4 million, and the number of internally displaced persons was also increasing steadily, largely as a result of armed conflicts and natural disasters. Indeed, conflict, political turmoil, economic stagnation, poverty and backwardness were the main causes that made the refugee problem intractable, in addition to environmental degradation and security challenges, which also exacerbated displacement.

She said that, in such a climate, the international community should continue to follow the principle of solidarity and shared responsibility, as well as to strengthen international cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit, in order to fulfil the common responsibility of addressing the question of refugees. Ending regional conflicts and maintaining a safe security environment remained the fundamental ways to solve the refugee problem. The majority of such conflicts on the Council's agenda were accompanied by serious refugee challenges, and most United Nations peacekeeping operations were now mandated with the task of protecting civilians and safeguarding humanitarian assistance.

It was, therefore, necessary for the Council further to enhance coordination and collaboration between conflict mediation and peacekeeping on the one hand, and refugee protection and humanitarian assistance on the other, she said. Such a balanced effort would ensure that peacekeeping operations created an enabling environment for the repatriation and social reintegration of refugees with the goal of finding a lasting solution to the challenges of refugees and internally displaced persons.



FRANCIS BUTAGIRA (Uganda), reaffirming his country's commitments to host a special summit of the African Union on internal displacement, said that problem was the responsibility of a sovereign State and did not fall under UNHCR's mandate. Recently, displacement had been caused, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, by the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The question was what the international community could do in situations where the State could not protect its citizens.

Recalling that the concept of responsibility to protect had been endorsed by the 2005 World Summit, he said nothing had been done to formalize it. It was high time the Council took the lead in reactivating the concept and finding out how it could be put into practice. As for the question of prevention, it was far cheaper than addressing the results of a catastrophe. Prevention was a concept that also touched on governance, as some internal displacement was the result of poor governance, an issue that should also be addressed. Although it was difficult for the Council to define the lines where its mandate was applicable, failing to address the issue of poor governance was unacceptable.

ABDELRAZAG GOUIDER (Libya) said no one could appreciate UNHCR's work more than people living in Africa and the Middle East, which had, over the past few decades, seen wars and natural disasters that had sparked large population flows. Along with protecting displaced persons and refugees, the countries concerned also faced the challenge of coping with the tensions that often arose between the displaced and local populations, as was the case with those displaced from Somalia, Sudan, Iraq and other countries. The ideal solution for addressing such problems was to prevent conflict, resolve disputes and resolve tensions, ensure safety and, ultimately, provide livelihoods and jobs.

He went on to recount the disturbing events in Gaza, where the civilian Palestinian population was being displaced due to collective punishment with Nazi-like overtones. The people of Gaza could not flee and had no option but death. The Security Council remained silent while those preventing it from shouldering its responsibilities were evincing tacit approval of Israel's operations. Libya appreciated the work carried out by UNRWA and its staff in very dangerous conditions, and hoped that the Council could quickly arrange a briefing of that Agency's Commissioner-General. The Council should ensure that no effort was spared in protecting all civilians in conflict, including displaced persons and refugees.

Council President JEAN-PIERRE LACROIX (France), speaking in his national capacity, said more regular meetings with the High Commissioner would be welcome. Displacement was not only due to conflict, but also to socio-political tension, the food and energy crises, extreme poverty and climate change. Since the international community must guarantee the protection of displaced populations, it was important to note that 5 million refugees had spent more than five years outside their homelands.

Welcoming the return home of many Afghan refugees, he said that, since they were an enormous challenge to Afghanistan and its neighbours, conditions must be created for their voluntary and dignified return. In addition, UNHCR was concerned about obstacles hindering the return of refugees to South Ossetia.

Speaking in favour of a global strategy to guarantee permanent return, he said a sectoral approach was needed for the protection of internally displaced persons. When national authorities could not protect their people, the international community must intervene. It was, therefore, important to implement the concept of responsibility to protect.

The general question of humanitarian access was essential for better treatment of refugees and internally displaced persons, he said, drawing attention in that regard to the situation in Gaza. Prolonged displacement in the territory was often linked to the failure to resolve armed conflict and human rights violations. The situation of the Palestinians was an example of the lack of a political settlement.

#### High Commissioner's Responses

Mr. GUTERRES, responding to several queries and concerns raised by Council members, said there was perhaps no single “humanitarian solution” to the refugee challenge, but comprehensive solutions would always require political commitment and institutional cooperation. The efforts of Costa Rica and Mexico to address the challenges of refugees and displaced persons through the implementation of dedicated programmes were laudable, as was their promotion of tolerance of, and solidarity with, refugee populations. Those delegations and others had called for global solidarity to ensure that refugees could return home in safety and find jobs and better livelihoods waiting for them.

Noting delegates’ concern about the targeting of humanitarian staff and the targeting of women and children in refugee camps, he said the intervention of peacekeeping forces was absolutely necessary in such instances. To the representative of Turkey, he said UNHCR was well aware that his country was one of asylum as well as transit. The Agency was working hard to provide support for all countries dealing with such mixed flows.

Overall the present time was a “difficult moment” for humanitarian organizations as their needs were increasing even in the face of the deepening global financial crisis. While understanding that Governments would do their utmost to address economic stability at home and around the globe, UNHCR could only hope they would show equal determination to ensure human protection for all.

Expressing appreciation for the statements by the representative of the United Kingdom and others who had expressed concern about the situation in Gaza, he said he hoped the situation of displacement could be addressed in a concrete and comprehensive manner as soon as possible. UNRWA was doing laudable work under extremely difficult circumstances in and around Gaza. UNHCR’s main concern, from the perspective of its mandate, was that the enclave’s population could not flee, which made the humanitarian imperative that much more pressing.

Thanking Viet Nam’s representative speaker for raising the issue of Statelessness, he said they were often forgotten people and UNHCR was working hard to address their problems. At the same time, today’s debate provided an opportunity to draw the Council’s attention, as well as that of the wider international community, to the need for greater efforts in addressing that issue.

As for the situation in Africa, he said UNHCR was pleased with positive progress in addressing refugee returns in countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire, among others. While regional cooperation mechanisms were largely responsible for that success, much more remained to be done, especially in securing broader support for host communities.

Among other key issues discussed, he cited “megatrends” on UNHCR’s future agenda, such as energy security and climate change, as well as the broad effort to curb and eradicate sexual exploitation and gender-based violence. The Agency was far from happy with the current sustainability of returns. Indeed, it had observed that people returning home often ended up becoming refugees in a short time, largely due to poor governance or the recurrence of conflict in their homelands. There was a real need to examine that issue seriously and implement measures to address it.

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