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Summary record of the 657th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 1 October 2012, at 10 a.m.

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chairperson** declared open the sixty-third session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and welcomed the new members of the Executive Committee, namely, Azerbaijan and Rwanda. He said that the presence of 87 members on the Executive Committee was indicative of the international community's awareness that the challenges facing the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were more than ever of a global nature, requiring broad and cohesive responses. Recalling that 2011 had seen a number of key anniversaries related to the international protection regime, he said that 92 States had made pledges concerning refugees and asylum seekers. There had also been an unprecedented commitment to actively address statelessness, including the pledge by 33 States to accede, or to take steps to accede, to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

2. He drew attention to the mission he had recently undertaken to Niger, where he had surveyed the situation of Malian refugees. Across the region, more than 265,000 Malians had fled into Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger. Notwithstanding the difficult conditions and existing humanitarian emergencies, the Government and the people of Niger had shown exemplary solidarity and the response to the influx of Malian refugees had been swift and efficient overall. While it was generally agreed that the worst of the refugee crisis might be over, efforts to assist the Malian refugees must be redoubled, including within a regional framework. Other acute refugee emergencies around the world, such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, also deserved the attention of UNHCR.

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters (A/AC.96/LXIII/1)

3. *The agenda was adopted.*

4. *A short film on the field activities of UNHCR in Mali, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic was shown.*

5. **The Chairperson**, introducing the guest speaker, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, said that the Executive Director and the High Commissioner had undertaken a joint mission to the Sahel region of West Africa in an initiative that underscored the close partnership between their two agencies.

6. **Ms. Cousin** (Executive Director of the World Food Programme) said that the conflicts that had flared up over the year had stretched the world's limited resources ever further, putting more lives and livelihoods at risk and testing the stamina and resolve of the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR and their staff. Despite the challenges, however, WFP held sacred its commitment to UNHCR and to the population it served. WFP would remain a steadfast partner in the delivery of the mandate of UNHCR and would continue to build on the partnership it had established with UNHCR in the development of operations and coordinated responses to crisis situations.

7. In Niger, the two agencies had made a commitment to address the regional dimension of the crisis and had developed a successful response that supported both drought- and conflict-affected populations as well as host communities in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. A similar regional response model was being used for the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

8. Recognizing that many wealthier countries were facing their own economic and social crises and resources available for humanitarian assistance were increasingly thinly

spread, upon taking office, she had undertaken to change the system through judging every decision, programme and dollar spent by its impact on the people who depended on the WFP. In order to fulfil its mandate of feeding the most vulnerable people more efficiently and effectively, WFP had embarked on a wide-reaching organizational realignment based on four principles: making the people WFP served the focus of all its work; making country offices the “centre of gravity”, with decision-making authority as close as possible to the point of implementation; turning regional bureaux into platforms for managing, overseeing and supporting country offices; and ensuring unity of purpose and a strong corporate identity so that all staff operated according to WFP core policies and strategies.

9. In line with the call for improved leadership, coordination and accountability for resource management and to affected people that was embodied in the Transformative Agenda, WFP and UNHCR were developing common implementation plans, including joint missions to enhance their response to refugee and/or mixed displacement situations. A high-level joint mission to Mauritania was being planned to further explore opportunities to enhance performance in that area. WFP pledged to design and deliver better food security and nutrition programming, faster logistics and interoperable, twenty-first century information systems in the world’s toughest places. In the regional refugee response to the Syrian conflict, WFP was exploring how UNHCR could use WFP infrastructure for the joint distribution of vouchers and cash to meet food and non-food needs. WFP saw great potential in linking vouchers and cash with interoperable, beneficiary registration systems, while recognizing the need to ensure the security of the information collected. Such arrangements would improve targeting, boost transparency and help with monitoring performance along the entire value chain from donor to beneficiary.

10. WFP and UNHCR were intensifying their focus on joint needs and market assessments; the first two of four joint evaluations on the contribution of food assistance to durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations had been completed. The evaluation in Ethiopia had raised concerns about the “care and maintenance” approach in protracted situations, since it could lead to refugees depending on food aid and provide disincentives to pursue alternative livelihoods. Thirteen recommendations had been made on ways of shifting to more durable solutions. The agencies were furthermore cooperating on the identification and development of resilience strategies for populations affected by crises, including host populations and refugee groups in protracted situations, and were exploring ways of engaging donors in those activities. WFP looked forward to working with UNHCR more closely to bring about the changes that were needed as a matter of urgency.

Introductory statement by the High Commissioner

11. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) paid tribute to the five UNHCR staff members who had lost their lives since the previous Executive Committee session. Recalling the kind of situations that were the *raison d’être* of the UNHCR mandate, he said that UNHCR was now grappling with four simultaneous acute emergencies which had triggered large-scale movements of refugees and significant internal displacement and placed enormous demands on the organization’s resources and those of its partners. Moreover, UNHCR continued to deal with the major crises of 2011 and support millions of other refugees in protracted situations.

12. The roots of the proliferation of largely unanticipated crises lay in part in a series of interconnected global trends, namely, accelerated demographic, climatic, social and economic change, incomplete democratization processes, the failure to address marginalization and inequality and competition for scarce resources. Those trends were compounded by the limited capacity of the international community to prevent and resolve conflicts in a timely manner. The ongoing lack of an effective global governance system resulted in conflicts emerging where they were least expected, while the absence of a strong

and effective international consensus on prevention and early resolution meant that new crises multiplied and chronic ones persisted.

13. Some 800,000 people had crossed borders in search of refuge in 2011, an all-time high, and more than 700,000 had fled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic thus far in 2012. Those population movements had significant social and economic consequences for host communities, yet countries had kept their borders open and respected the principle of non-refoulement. Genuine burden-sharing and effective solidarity were needed to match the generosity of host countries.

14. The succession of crises and increasingly challenging and dangerous environments had radically tested the capacity of UNHCR to deliver on its mandate and reach the most severely affected populations, thereby increasing the number forced to flee inside countries or across borders. As conflicts were becoming more complex, keeping humanitarian action independent from political and security agendas was more necessary, but also more difficult, than ever.

15. Fortunately, UNHCR had ended 2011 in a very solid financial situation, despite the global economic crisis. The organization had spent US\$ 2.18 billion in 2011, with an implementation rate of 96 per cent. Thanks to the generosity of donors, the level of voluntary contributions projected for 2012 was similar in dollar terms to that of 2011; however, the needs in the field, especially for emergencies, had significantly increased. Prior to 2010, the biggest humanitarian emergencies had been the result of natural disasters or of large-scale internal displacement caused by conflict. However, the most significant crises in 2011 and 2012 had been refugee emergencies. That state of affairs put enormous pressure on human and financial resources; UNHCR operations in Africa, in particular, were dramatically underfunded. For example, in Chad, only US\$ 44 million had been received out of the US\$ 95 million of authorized expenditure. There was no room for any unforeseen needs; therefore he appealed to all UNHCR donors for additional support.

16. In addition to securing donor support, he had made it a key priority to find additional savings at headquarters and, wherever possible, to optimize the use of the resources entrusted to UNHCR. As a result, in the year to date, some US\$ 60 million in savings had been made and diverted to new emergencies without agreements with implementing partners being disrupted or core protection activities and lifesaving assistance being unaffected. The Office had also undertaken a robust review of procurement plans, albeit limited to mission-critical procurement only. Stockpile replenishment was being carefully controlled and exchange rate gains in the field were being captured and applied to emergency operations. Travel and training had been cut back and measures taken to streamline staffing costs and align geographic and functional coverage to organizational priorities.

17. A limited workforce reduction was planned for 2013, which could mean that some staff on fixed term and temporary appointments might not have their contracts extended. For the first time, special measures would be introduced to reduce the size of the international professional workforce. As a result, some contract-holders without posts could also be affected. He recognized that the measures had created great anxiety for staff members and their families, and was committed to ensuring that the process was managed fairly, that the Office was responsive to the concerns and needs of staff and that it did all it could to find solutions and mitigate the impact on those affected. However, he also recognized that consolidation was needed and that, at a moment of tightened public spending in many countries, the Office had a paramount obligation to use available resources efficiently to benefit the people of concern to UNHCR directly.

18. UNHCR continued to make good use of un-earmarked funds, particularly in response to new operations and in funding forgotten crises. However, un-earmarked funds

had now been exhausted. Given that only 13 per cent of un-earmarked funds had been spent on headquarters costs in 2011, he could guarantee that any additional un-earmarked funds received would be used in field operations where they were most needed.

19. As a result of intensified efforts to reach out to non-traditional donors, including the private sector, contributions from private donors had reached US\$ 111 million to UNHCR in 2011, an increase of 53 per cent over 2010. Partnerships were being developed with the private sector, including through a dedicated team working directly under the leadership of the Deputy High Commissioner.

20. Recalling the major impact on host countries of large refugee influxes, he said that he was committed to finding ways to recognize the contributions of refugee host countries more tangibly and was encouraged by the work of the Steering Committee on developing a framework to understand and capture those contributions more comprehensively. While he was aware of the costs of asylum systems and integration programmes in the industrialized world, he still believed that increased international burden-sharing and solidarity were needed in order to enhance the efforts of refugee-hosting countries, through financial and political support and enhanced resettlement programmes.

21. He said that he welcomed the presence of Ms. Ertharin Cousin, the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), and that UNHCR was privileged to have a deep and long-standing relationship with WFP. In providing support for refugee operations WFP had never failed. The two agencies were running joint operations in some 37 countries, serving some 9.7 million persons of concern. In the most dangerous locations, wherever UNHCR was to be found, WFP was there too.

22. In recent years, the capacity and architecture of the humanitarian system had evolved significantly. UNHCR remained firmly committed to the responsibilities it had assumed under the humanitarian reform process, and had contributed actively to the development of the Transformative Agenda. However, changes in the humanitarian landscape also had important implications for how UNHCR could best fulfil its mandate. The Office would continue to seek synergies between refugee coordination mechanisms under UNHCR leadership and broader humanitarian coordination arrangements, including under the cluster approach. The examples of the Syrian Arab Republic and Mali showed that that could be successfully achieved.

23. The Office was now applying a flexible model in refugee operations that enabled partners to take an enhanced role in planning, coordination and delivery. Moreover, a structured dialogue on its strategic relationship with NGOs was well-advanced. Through those processes, it was seeking to manage refugee operations in their broader context and ensure a coherent and impartial response that took into account the legal status and characteristics of refugees and their need for particular forms of protection and support.

24. After three years of reforms to strengthen UNHCR emergency response capacity, the concept of corporate responsibility for emergencies had now taken root. The Office's rosters had been strengthened. Preparedness and response had been embedded as core responsibilities in all parts of the organization and a roster of senior managers for immediate deployment in major crises was in place. Moreover, NGO and Government partners continued to play a critical role: personnel mobilized through standby arrangements with external partners currently accounted for around half of emergency deployments. National partnerships also continued to be reinforced and a new project was being developed to strengthen the emergency response capacity of 11 national NGOs.

25. Strengthened partnerships with States were needed, particularly at the onset of major emergencies. At those moments, acute logistical and other challenges frequently arose, requiring the engineering and technical capacity that only Governments could provide. In

that respect the Office was deepening its cooperation with national civil defence agencies, including through the International Humanitarian Partnership.

26. In parallel with the measures described, UNHCR had significantly strengthened and professionalized its supply service. Over the past 18 months, in 92 per cent of UNHCR airlifts, delivery had taken place within 72 hours of the request being made. In line with the auditors' recommendations, the Office was also improving compliance and risk management, as well as strengthening procurement and contracting procedures.

27. With regard to staff safety, he said that in order to enable staff to operate safely, heavy investments continued to be made in protective hardware and equipment and in training field safety staff in analytical capacities and the skills needed to reach out to communities and support colleagues in the field. The best way to ensure staff security was by developing positive relationships with communities and building acceptance through adherence to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. Moreover, UNHCR now had a manual on addressing threats to the security of persons of concern. It was currently being rolled out so as to support host Governments in ensuring a safe and secure environment for those that UNHCR served.

28. On protracted situations, while political resolutions went beyond the UNHCR mandate, much could be done to advance the prospect of solutions from the early stages of an emergency through to when a peace process began to take root. The escalation of a crisis could be prevented through advocacy to highlight its humanitarian consequences and the use of conflict-sensitive approaches in the Office's operations. Ways could be found of enhancing human dignity and self-reliance from the outset. Indeed, UNHCR already tried to facilitate access to existing services and support alternatives to traditional, camp-based approaches. The new "out of camp" policy for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia was a case in point.

29. In Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, UNHCR had established a unique joint project with the IKEA Foundation to enhance the self-reliance of Somali refugees through interventions in education, livelihoods, environmental activities and support to the local community. The principle was that early investments helped refugees retain and reinforce their social and economic capital and the skills they needed to build a vision of a future, otherwise disillusionment and despair could easily set in. Hence, cash and voucher-based support mechanisms were being used in many operations to enable refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to determine and address their own priority needs. The Office had been working closely with WFP on that approach.

30. UNHCR also continued to pursue new ways of ensuring that displacement was firmly on the development agenda, including through the Transitional Solutions Initiative being piloted with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in response to the protracted situations in eastern Sudan and Colombia. It was hoped that Nepal could be added as a pilot country, subject to the Government's final endorsement of the joint programme. UNHCR was working closely with UNDP, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and other partners to implement the recent decision of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee on durable solutions.

31. It was important to be ready to take advantage of opportunities, particularly for voluntary repatriation. The majority of those who had fled Côte d'Ivoire in 2011 had already returned home. In Myanmar, he hoped that positive developments would lead to a resolution of the plight of hundreds of thousands of refugees in Thailand and other countries in the region. He also strongly hoped that 2013 would be a year of opportunity for Somalis and make it possible to leverage potential solutions in a way that had not been possible for two decades. Regrettably, the current pressure on resources meant that the Office was unable to take full advantage of opportunities to help refugees return home. As a

result, tens of thousands of refugees from Liberia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were at risk of remaining stranded in exile.

32. Provided that a protection safety net was maintained, complementary approaches to the three traditional durable solutions could be considered, such as temporary migration management arrangements, alternative legal stays and other mobility-related initiatives. The recent decision by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to regularize the status of all undocumented Afghans provided an opportunity to be explored.

33. There was scope to reinforce the collective commitment to achieving progress in resolving situations of protracted displacement, including, where appropriate, the timely invocation of cessation clauses. In that regard, comprehensive strategies continued to be pursued, with a range of solutions being implemented in tandem rather than in sequence. A significant breakthrough had been made in regard to those displaced in the western Balkans, through the conclusion of a regional plan to resolve displacement stemming from the 1991–1995 conflict. The new Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees had been endorsed at an international conference in May 2012 and marked an invigorated drive towards securing solutions to their long-standing plight. It also provided a multilateral framework for the robust engagement of development stakeholders in addressing issues related to sustainable return and reintegration, as well as support to host communities.

34. He was also extremely grateful to the 26 States that continued to accept refugees for resettlement. Close to 80,000 refugees had been admitted in 2011, some 61,600 with UNHCR assistance. The three emergency transit centres in Romania, the Philippines and Slovakia played a key role in urgent evacuations and in facilitating access to resettlement countries. It should never be forgotten, however, that preserving asylum space for refugees, creating the conditions for self-reliance and allowing for solutions to be implemented required strong international solidarity with host communities, many of which had made extraordinary gestures of generosity. The foundation to securing progress towards solutions lay, as ever, in collective resolve and international solidarity. He remained unswerving in his commitment to pursuing durable solutions to displacement and appealed to all Executive Committee members to reinforce their support for the programmes and initiatives he had described.

35. At the 2011 Ministerial Meeting to mark the anniversaries of the 1951 and 1961 Conventions, 92 States had made pledges relating to refugees and asylum seekers and on durable solutions. The event had been a landmark in the reinforcement of the international protection regime. Twenty-two States had made pledges in relation to internal displacement, including 10 African countries that had undertaken to ratify the Kampala Convention or incorporate it into national laws and policies. Norway and Switzerland, supported by three other States, had signalled their readiness to lead a global debate on addressing protection gaps arising from cross-border displacement linked to sudden-onset disasters, including those triggered by climate change.

36. There had been unprecedented expressions of concern about the situation of millions of stateless people around the world. Sixty-one States had made pledges, including in relation to accession to the conventions on statelessness, law reform and improvement of civil registration and documentation systems. The European Union had recently made an additional pledge that all its member States would become parties to the 1954 Convention. Seven countries had acceded to one or both conventions since the Ministerial Meeting and two had introduced statelessness determination procedures. The process was gaining momentum. Decisive action was needed to resolve the situation of millions of people who had been stateless for generations. Protracted statelessness situations were not a problem to be addressed at some future date. Solutions were needed now, and he called on all States to make a firm commitment to ending statelessness within the next decade.

37. In addition to the Ministerial Meeting, UNHCR had also co-organized, together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Government of the Republic of Turkmenistan, the International Ministerial Conference on Refugees in the Muslim World held in Ashgabat in May 2012. In December 2012, the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection would focus on faith and protection, building on the importance of shared common values in all religious traditions and the valuable role of faith communities in caring for people of concern.

38. On the subject of temporary protection, he said that UNHCR recognized that temporary protection arrangements could be an important tool for delivering international protection, as recently demonstrated by Turkey in the Syrian crisis. The challenge was to locate that tool within a broader international protection framework built on the 1951 Convention and predicated on responsibility and burden-sharing. UNHCR wished to start a process of consultation with States in certain regions to understand better the practice of temporary protection and its place in addressing contemporary cross-border displacement challenges.

39. Progress continued to be made in reinforcing UNHCR protection capacities. The number of protection positions worldwide had increased by 70 per cent since 2005. Protection staff now constituted 26 per cent of the workforce, as against 19 per cent seven years before. A number of positions had recently been advertised to further strengthen the Office's work in key areas such as sexual and gender-based violence, refugee status determination and statelessness.

40. He was particularly pleased with the advances made over the year on a number of key protection priorities. The Office was currently supporting the roll-out of the updated strategy on sexual and gender-based violence, providing additional funding for special projects in 15 key operations, with a particular focus on providing a safe environment, access to domestic energy, protecting groups at particular risk, including children, and engaging men and boys. He had high expectations that the Office's reinforced cooperation with UN-Women would lead to an increase in protection capacity for women and girls.

41. A new education strategy for 2012–2016 was being rolled out in 13 priority countries. The significance of education had been amply demonstrated in the context of ongoing emergencies. As well as a key right in itself, it had a broader child-protection role. It also played a part in stabilizing communities which had been subject to significant disruption and upheaval. Education paved the way for durable solutions, by educating the potential peacebuilders of tomorrow. In that context, he saluted the work of Hawa Aden Mohamed, the 2012 Nansen Refugee Award laureate, with women and girls in north-eastern Somalia.

42. UNHCR and its partners had elaborated a new framework for the protection of children. Work was ongoing to strengthen capacities in that area, particularly in emergencies. On both education and child protection, the Office was committed to working closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and NGO partners, as well as national child protection and education authorities.

43. UNHCR was taking measures to implement its new urban refugee policy but faced a range of challenges, especially in contexts where refugees were living alongside others affected by urban poverty. Experience had demonstrated the importance of providing technical support and advocacy to incorporate refugee assistance into existing central and local government programmes, rather than creating parallel structures.

44. Work continued on expanding access to and knowledge of urban populations and developing more effective communication methods. In Damascus, for example, efforts were being made to reach out to Iraqi refugees affected by insecurity and disruption of basic services, through telephone hotlines and community outreach.

45. New detention guidelines had just been released, which reflected the current status of international law, had a particular focus on alternatives to detention, and made it clear that detention of asylum seekers should in principle be avoided. Their detention should always be the exception and not the rule.

46. UNHCR also remained fully committed to meeting its enhanced responsibilities in relation to the protection of IDPs and to remaining a reliable and predictable partner in the framework of the cluster approach. The fact that, in 2012, an increased volume of un-earmarked funding was being mobilized for operations for the internally displaced, despite the considerable pressure from the growing number of refugee emergencies, demonstrated the Office's corporate commitment to internally displaced people.

47. Turning to institutional reform, he said that the challenges faced over the year had underscored the value of the Office's sustained investment in reforms to channel resources more effectively. Reforms had included a strong programme of decentralizing and outposting, more recently through the establishment of a new information and communications technology service centre in Amman. A performing organization needed a robust central governance capacity but not a huge central bureaucracy. Costs had been driven down by reducing bureaucratic processes and transferring functions and responsibilities from Geneva to locations where they could be better assumed, freeing up resources for a focus on strategic direction, accountability and control. UNHCR remained committed to improving organizational performance, efficiency and delivery and to placing accountability at the heart of its relationship with all stakeholders.

48. To tackle the weaknesses identified in the 2010 auditors' report significant investments were being made in the Office's financial management and programme control capacity. At the beginning of 2012 the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) for the recording and reporting of financial transactions had been adopted, and a culture of personal responsibility and accountability was being developed throughout the organization, including through the implementation of the Global Management and Accountability Framework. An enterprise risk-management system was being introduced to ensure a more analytical and consistent approach to organizational risk management. The roll-out plan stretched into 2014.

49. Through the simplification initiative, efforts were being made to streamline planning and reporting, postings and other processes. The Focus software was being adapted to be more user-friendly for colleagues in the field and a pilot global Focus platform accessible to Executive Committee members had been launched. An independent compliance and accountability committee had also recently been established, and the will was there to make UNHCR an accountable and performing organization, with strong foundations and the capacity to adapt to a changing landscape.

50. Looking ahead, he said that the demands of the new refugee emergencies would not deflect attention from the endeavour of reinforcing the international protection regime. It was important to look forward. People living in protracted despair could not be abandoned just because their plight had fallen off the media radar, or political priorities had shifted or because it seemed too difficult to do otherwise. The solution to a displacement crisis was always political. But the current lack of collective capacity to generate sustainable political solutions meant that humanitarian action was needed more than ever.

51. There were still significant gaps in terms of response. While the collective response to refugee crises had been commendable, the record on internal displacement was not as good. It was in countries where violence was ongoing that the challenges were greatest. Humanitarian access might be restricted for security reasons, and, in some areas, because the political aspirations underlying conflict became folded into the activities of criminals or foreign-sponsored radical movements. Some parties to conflict might also try to block

humanitarian access because they wished to avoid having witnesses to their activities. It was essential, nonetheless, to continue to engage with all relevant actors to enable people in need to secure protection and assistance, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Attempts to link the language of humanitarianism to political agendas and to undermine the neutrality, independence and impartiality of humanitarian action must be rejected.

52. In dangerous times in an unpredictable world, more and more people were forced to flee in search of refuge. He urged all Executive Committee members to renew their collective commitment to addressing their plight, and the plight of all who found themselves uprooted from their homes and communities, as crises continued to unfold.

General debate

53. **Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that in recent months several countries in the region had taken steps to accede to or ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Group of Latin American and Caribbean States attached particular importance to programmes and policies to ensure registration of births as a basic means of protecting human rights and helping to eliminate statelessness.

54. He emphasized the value of regional initiatives and cooperation in refugee protection. Regional and international cooperation were also of great importance in the search for sustainable solutions, including voluntary repatriation, as were schemes to facilitate refugees' integration in host countries and "solidarity resettlement". The countries of the region would continue their efforts in that regard under the 2004 Mexico Plan of Action to Strengthen the International Protection of Refugees in Latin America.

55. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that, regrettably, Africa was still the leading theatre of operations for UNHCR. The Sahel crisis required a global multidimensional response. He called on UNHCR to designate the Sahel as a priority action area for the coming year and to work with other United Nations agencies on an integrated approach to that situation.

56. UNHCR had proved that it could respond effectively; it was now necessary to move towards a more proactive, early warning culture. In that regard he would welcome a discussion between UNHCR and member States on the Transformative Agenda and its role in creating new synergies in UNHCR and across agencies in order to meet protection challenges.

57. **Ms. Zappia** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that positive political developments notwithstanding — notably in Myanmar — it was still important to focus on outstanding humanitarian and protection questions and on forgotten crises. Given the steady increase in humanitarian crises at a time of budgetary stress, UNHCR needed to be prepared to respond swiftly and effectively to new crises, while maintaining support for forgotten crises and addressing the need for collective effort. Reform of the international response system went hand in hand with sustaining the efforts of national authorities and local populations in accommodating refugee and displacement crises. Protection challenges of particular concern to the European Union were the situation in the Yida camp in South Sudan, Dadaab, Mali, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

58. The European Union encouraged UNHCR to ensure that Transformative Agenda commitments were mainstreamed into the key aspects of its operations. UNHCR should continue investing in strong leadership by presenting candidates for the Inter-Agency

Standing Committee (IASC) Humanitarian Coordinator pool. It should also seek an effective interface between refugee coordination and cluster leadership.

59. The European Union itself continued to work towards reinforcement of the international protection regime. The common European asylum system was being developed to ensure fair, effective and equal treatment of asylum seekers in all member States. The European Asylum Support Office had been established to enhance synergies among the European Union member States. Regional protection programmes were a key instrument of the European Union's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility. The European Union attached great importance to voluntary resettlement and, through the Joint EU Resettlement Programme for 2013, hoped to see more resettlement places offered by more member States.

60. **Ms. Richard** (United States of America) said that her Government had made progress in implementing the pledges it had made at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting. One of those was to promote women's equal right to nationality. In general, women must be included as full and equal partners in bringing conflict to an end and building lasting security. In that context, the United States had adopted the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security to accelerate and institutionalize its own efforts to advance women's participation in making and keeping peace.

61. The United States had put gender equality and advancement of women and girls at the forefront of foreign policy, launching a global strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. More than US\$ 60 million had been put towards combating gender-based violence in several countries over the past four years.

62. Her Government now required all its partner organizations to have in place a guiding doctrine consistent with the IASC core principles to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse. The operating procedures of the United States Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration were designed to help staff prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

63. **Mr. Hasanov** (Azerbaijan) commended UNHCR on its ability to respond to emerging crises in a timely manner. In his country, owing to the Armenian policy of occupation and ethnic cleansing, some 20 per cent of the territory was under military occupation and there were 1 million refugees and IDPs. Two international missions had confirmed the complete destruction of the occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and the forced settlement in the area by ethnic Armenians. In order to address the situation of the refugees and IDPs, with the help of international donors and UNHCR, his Government had replaced the camps with 71 fully equipped modern settlements, providing better living conditions for some 120,000 people. In addition, the Government had granted Azerbaijani citizenship to 250,000 refugees who had been expelled from Armenia and 50,000 refugees from Central Asia. Over 20 years, Azerbaijan had spent US\$ 5.4 billion on improving the situation of refugees and IDPs, of which US\$ 900 million had been provided by international organizations. However, many thousands of IDPs continued to live in difficult conditions. He called on the international community to take the necessary political steps to resolve the problem of long-term displacement, which posed a real threat to international peace and security. Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs should be allowed to return to their homes on a voluntary basis, in safety and dignity.

64. **Mr. Kajwang** (Kenya) said that humanity continued to be confronted by multiple challenges, including new forms of forced displacement caused largely by armed conflicts, increasing natural disasters, and protracted refugee situations. The presence of over one million Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa bore testimony to that state of affairs. Some 600,000 Somalis were registered refugees living in camps and cities in Kenya. While the Somali refugee crisis was one of the worst and longest in the world, the forces of the

African Union Mission in Somalia had now liberated Mogadishu and Kismayo, and Al-Shabaab was currently in disarray. Recent political events in Somalia were encouraging, particularly the outcome of the Presidential election on 10 September 2012 and the commitment of the Somali people and leadership to concluding the transition. He urged the international community to support the Somali Government in its efforts towards reconciliation, peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction, to back the ongoing African Union action for peace and capacity-building for civil administration, and to facilitate the return of Somali refugees to the areas now under civilian administration. As a first step towards voluntary return, a mapping exercise should be undertaken to assess the situation on the ground. Regrettably, over the previous two years, Kenya had witnessed an upsurge in insecurity, including sporadic attacks on churches, urban centres and even refugee camps.

65. **Ms. Larsen** (Norway) expressed concern about the human suffering caused by the most serious ongoing conflicts and the lack of financial support, especially to Africa. She said that her Government was willing to contribute more and urged others to do so as well. Suffering was increasing in the Middle East and required huge efforts from UNHCR to address internal and external displacement.

66. Finding a solution to the protracted refugee situations that currently affected over seven million people was a priority for Norway. In order to achieve the necessary sustained political engagement, UNHCR should work closely with host Governments, development actors and the donor community.

67. Norway commended the approach of UNHCR in adapting the 1951 Refugee Convention to new and unforeseen circumstances. UNHCR should remain committed to gender equality and focus more on the risk of persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

68. She welcomed the commitment of UNHCR to the Transformative Agenda of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and encouraged the Office to contribute high-calibre leaders in humanitarian emergencies and to work with NGOs. She urged participants to support the Nansen Initiative, a process of consultation and research on cross-border displacement owing to natural disasters and environmental degradation.

69. **Mr. Ullah** (Pakistan) said that millions of Afghan refugees were still waiting to return to Afghanistan. Local integration was not an option for Pakistan or the Afghans. Pakistan had hosted Afghan refugees for over 30 years, despite dwindling support from the international community. A political solution was now necessary to help rebuild Afghanistan, and substantial, targeted support and contributions were needed to facilitate the dignified repatriation of refugees, in line with the solutions strategy agreed in May 2012. The most important element of the strategy was the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, which would ensure their participation in the prosperity and development of their country while having a stabilizing effect on the entire region. Pakistan would not grant Afghan refugees the status of economic migrants or any other status.

70. His Government was currently considering its refugee policy for 2013 and beyond and would take into account the capacity of and implications for the Government and the population in that regard. The level of development assistance pledged by the international community for Afghanistan was encouraging. It was of utmost importance that those pledges were now translated into concrete commitments and adequate resources provided to support the solutions strategy.

71. **Mr. Hassan** (Djibouti) welcomed the democratic Presidential elections in Somalia, signalling the end of the transitional period in that country. He urged the international community to provide swift, robust and durable support for the democratic process in order to facilitate peace and the repatriation and reintegration of the Somali population. The

normalization of the situation and the re-establishment of a Somali State would contribute to regional and global peace and stability.

72. In his country, some refugees were living in camps, such as Holl Holl, which the Government had reopened in order to relieve overcrowding in the Ali Addeh camp, while others were in the cities. The authorities had re-established an eligibility committee in 2012 in order to deal with the numerous applications for refugee status. Providing employment opportunities to prepare refugees to reintegrate once in their countries of origin was extremely important.

73. There were also increasing numbers of mixed migrants coming from neighbouring countries and heading towards the Arabian Peninsula. His Government was extremely concerned at the activities of transboundary criminal networks that shamelessly exploited thousands of people, including women and children, who were merely seeking a better life. A multilateral response was urgently needed to resolve that situation.

74. **Mr. Molapo** (Lesotho) said that, while there were very few refugees in his country, his Government supported all efforts to prevent new refugee outflows. That would constitute progress in the search for durable solutions for the existing persons of concern to UNHCR. His Government was committed to promoting and implementing humanitarian instruments regionally and globally and was in the process of raising public awareness to ensure that the refugees in his country continued to have access to basic services.

75. Lesotho had incorporated the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) into its domestic legal order. The resulting legislation also addressed the issue of displacement brought about by developments taking place in Lesotho, especially the construction of large dams in mountain areas. Refugees were now being registered in the new e-border management system being introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs so they could be identified in the context of mixed migration flows. They would be issued with personal identification documents by the beginning of 2013. That would further consolidate their enjoyment of the legitimate rights and freedoms they already enjoyed to a large degree in Lesotho, where they had the same rights as citizens to employment and education.

76. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner), responding to the points raised, said that Latin America was a key player in the international protection system. The Cartagena Declaration on Refugees went beyond the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Mexico Plan of Action was equally impressive, and the region had some of the best national legislation on asylum in the world. He urged members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries to participate more actively in internal discussions on UNHCR strategies and action plans.

77. While there were many crises in Africa, countries there generously kept their borders open and accepted those in need of protection. He would welcome discussion with the Group of African States on the impact of the Transformative Agenda on the activities of the Office. The Sahel remained a priority for UNHCR; the situation posed a threat to regional and global peace and security. The international community must make a concerted effort to find a political solution to the crisis in order to facilitate an adequate response to the humanitarian situation.

78. UNHCR commended the efforts being made to harmonize asylum regimes within the European Union, which would enhance protection capacity within and outside Europe. The dramatic humanitarian situation in the Yida refugee camp in South Sudan was high on the agenda of UNHCR, but only member States could stop armed groups operating in camps.

79. He welcomed the increased support of the United States to UNHCR and its work on the pledges for the 2011 Ministerial Meeting. He agreed that the protection and empowerment of women were key tools in finding solutions to crises and that refugee and displaced women must participate in peace negotiations if peace and democracy were to prosper. UNHCR would welcome enhanced cooperation with the United States on its initiative to prevent gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

80. He commended Azerbaijan for its efforts to resolve the situation of IDPs and refugees, improve their living conditions and restore their dignity, regardless of the Government's political objectives. That proved the worthlessness of using people's misery for political gain.

81. He commended the Government of Kenya for its continued patience and acceptance of refugees from the region, particularly Somalia. The international community should grasp the opportunity to create the conditions for a resolution to the Somali crisis and for the success of a meaningful programme of voluntary repatriation. UNHCR would continue its strong cooperation with Kenya to that end.

82. UNHCR appreciated the financial support, resettlement programmes and commitment of Norway to assist others worldwide to solve problems and thus prevent displacement. He was grateful for the support of Norway for durable solutions to protracted refugee situations and the Nansen Initiative, which could become an important part of future international protection regimes.

83. With over 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees and maybe another million unregistered, Pakistan had the world's biggest refugee problem. He commended Pakistan for maintaining its effective refugee protection regime. UNHCR was fully committed to the solutions strategy for Afghan refugees, which would require strong commitment from the international community. He urged the Government of Pakistan to establish a transition mechanism by the end of 2012 to allow refugees who were still in a temporary situation in 2013 and beyond to find a solution.

84. Djibouti had maintained its generous policy towards those needing protection within its borders, including by reopening the Holl Holl camp. There was often great suffering, especially for women, who were caught up in the complex migration flows through Djibouti. He called for increased international cooperation to combat criminal activity linked to the migration process. He commended Lesotho for its incorporation of the Kampala Convention into domestic legislation and the measures it was implementing to protect refugees on its borders.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.