



General Assembly

Distr.: General
1 December 2015
English
Original: French

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

Summary record of the 692nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 9 October 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Comissário(Mozambique)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2016-2017

(continued)

1. **Mr. Nagayama** (Japan) said that Japan, for which human security was one of the pillars of foreign policy, supported the activities carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). His Government was nevertheless concerned about the scale of the UNHCR financial deficit and was making every effort to provide prompt and needs-based assistance. It had gradually increased the proportion of its unearmarked funding, which currently accounted for 60 per cent of its contributions. He pointed out that 80 per cent of UNHCR funds came from 10 donor countries, and welcomed the efforts made to find new donors and engage the private sector. He also asked UNHCR to explain the 30 per cent increase in the number of staff in between assignments in 2015, resulting in over US\$ 7 million in costs.

2. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) noted that the United States, which had contributed more than \$1.3 billion to UNHCR in 2015, was the largest donor of the organization. Her Government believed that an increase in the UNHCR budget must be accompanied by enhanced oversight and accountability. It also called upon the members of the Executive Committee to support UNHCR's work through flexible and predictable contributions and to limit earmarked contributions. She endorsed the budget for 2016-2017 and encouraged UNHCR to organize further consultative meetings during the course of the year in order to maintain strong communication with donor States. In addition, the United States called upon UNHCR to ensure greater transparency in decision-making both within the organization and in dealing with partners. The planning and budgetary decisions of UNHCR field offices should also take into account their partners' inputs and feedback. Lastly, UNHCR must explain clearly what activities it was unable to conduct owing to a lack of funding.

3. **Mr. Kühle** (Germany) said that Germany had increased its contribution to UNHCR in 2015 to €109 million, and that it would keep it at that level. His Government believed that more unearmarked contributions had to be made to UNHCR, to enable it to react with sufficient flexibility to unforeseen events. It was vital to strike the right balance between earmarked and unearmarked funding through efficient communication between UNHCR and its partners, as well as among partners. Likewise, it should be possible to reallocate funds if the programme or project for which they were intended was already sufficiently funded.

4. **Ms. Abera** (Ethiopia) expressed concern about the high level of earmarked contributions, which limited UNHCR flexibility and led to inequalities between countries in terms of the protection and services provided. She urged donor countries to make unearmarked contributions.

5. **Ms. O'Donnell** (Australia) expressed the hope that the World Humanitarian Summit would make it possible to lay the foundations for a fundamental reform of the humanitarian system, on the basis of one plan and one budget, in order to address medium and long-term needs in protracted crises. She urged UNHCR not to overlook the crises in the Asia Pacific region, where the number of refugees and displaced persons remained a major cause of concern.

6. **Mr. Karklins** (Latvia), mentioning the difficulty involved in determining who was in need of UNHCR protection, asked what criteria were used to prepare the statistical data on refugees and displaced persons that served as a basis for budget requests.

7. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the members of the Executive Committee for their support, in particular those countries that had contributed a large proportion of unearmarked funds. She stressed that UNHCR did everything in its power to quickly reassign its staff and that staff in between assignments accounted for only 3 per cent of all UNHCR employees. Furthermore, UNHCR was committed to ensuring more efficient communication with its partners. She asked States to make as few earmarked contributions as possible and to avoid earmarking their contributions for specific countries or sectors. In that regard, she pointed out that the UNHCR response capacity in Ethiopia had to a large extent been made possible by unearmarked contributions. As to the question of definition raised by the representative of Latvia, she referred to the status of stateless persons and to the distinction made between citizens and non-citizens, with the latter not being entitled to the same civil and political rights as citizens. UNHCR was continuing to work with Latvia on that issue.

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters
(A/AC.96/1147)

8. **Mr. Srisukwattana** (Rapporteur) drew the attention of the delegations to paragraph (c) of the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1147, annex VII), where adoption of the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2016-2017 was proposed, amounting to \$6,546,288,297 for 2016 and \$6,408,521,723 for 2017.

9. **The Chairperson** said he took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft programme and budget 2016-2017 as contained in the draft general decision.

10. *It was so decided.*

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

11. **Ms. Jafri** (Rapporteur for annual consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) said that, in 2015, the annual consultations with NGOs on the theme of pursuing solutions had involved 273 NGOs from 86 countries. Reinforced partnerships with all stakeholders and the need to adopt a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance had been identified as priorities. With regard to other topics discussed, she said that the need to engage all persons of concern to UNHCR as well as host communities in pursuing solutions and drawing up development plans with development partners from the outset of a crisis had been emphasized. The importance of political will had also been mentioned, in particular with regard to protection at sea and climate change. It had been reiterated that displaced persons must not be overlooked and must be guaranteed protection and the exercise of all their rights, including the right to health and education. In 2014, UNHCR had worked with 908 partners, more than half of whom had been local NGOs. The need for local stakeholders to receive sustained support was among the themes of the World Humanitarian Summit to be held in 2016. The consultation dedicated to young refugees was the one most talked about. A series of meetings with young people would be organized in preparation for a global refugee youth consultation to be held in June 2016.

12. **Mr. Srisukwattana** (Rapporteur) said he had followed the annual consultations with NGOs and believed that the link established between NGOs and UNHCR with a view to ensuring the protection of refugees and seeking solutions had brought advantages. The diversity of NGO opinions and experiences helped UNHCR to better understand the situation on the ground. That dialogue should continue as it enriched the discussions of the Executive Committee.

13. **Ms. Andersen** (Norway) said that the annual consultations constituted an increasingly important framework for more solid partnerships between NGOs and UNHCR, and that it might be useful to examine the way in which Member States could participate in those consultations, which would help strengthen overall confidence and knowledge, in particular with regard to the implementation of the programme budget by partners. UNHCR should continue establishing partnerships based on humanitarian principles, equity and transparency in order to build confidence and strengthen cooperation between the Member States, the United Nations system and NGOs. For their part, NGOs should demonstrate transparency and a sense of responsibility.

14. **Ms. Schmidt-Martin** (Ireland) said that NGOs implemented an increasing share of UNHCR programmes and often had better access to vulnerable communities and were more familiar with local contexts. Her Government believed that humanitarian funding mechanisms should be strengthened and adapted to ensure more efficient and flexible deployment of resources and to support the activities and capacity-building of local stakeholders. During the World Humanitarian Summit, Ireland would focus its efforts on promoting the subsidiarity principle in decision-making. As a co-host of the Pooled Funds Working Group, Ireland would continue to advocate greater use of those funds in order to help anchor humanitarian action to a greater extent within the local context.

15. **Mr. Tabah** (Canada) praised the commitment of UNHCR personnel worldwide. Canada encouraged NGOs to focus together with UNHCR on the consideration of issues related to partnerships.

16. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) welcomed the dialogue between UNHCR and NGOs, as well as the introduction of new tools, such as the enhanced framework for partnerships. Communication and data analysis were indispensable to coordination and cooperation between UNHCR and NGOs. The United States supported the comprehensive and inclusive approach described in the report on annual consultations with NGOs, and encouraged UNHCR to carefully consider implementing the recommendations contained in that document. Her Government would also like to know how UNHCR planned to follow up on the findings and recommendations of that report. It was vital for UNHCR and NGOs to harmonize their approaches in order to conduct efficient activities and to make the most of their resources. The United States welcomed UNHCR efforts to expand its partnerships with NGOs, non-traditional donors, the private sector and development and human rights actors, and encouraged it to establish new partnerships. Lastly, the United States looked forward to hearing more about the forthcoming UNHCR consultations on youth and on the way in which young people, whose potential was largely untapped, would participate in them.

17. **Ms. Jafri** (Rapporteur for annual consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs)) thanked the speakers for their statements and added that the recommendations and conclusions contained in the report would help follow up on activities aimed at assisting refugees.

18. **Mr. Srisukwattana** (Rapporteur), noting that the Executive Committee had never dealt with the subject of protection of young people in its conclusions, expressed the hope that it would address that issue in the future.

Other statements

19. **Mr. Avognon** (Chairperson, UNHCR Staff Council) said that ensuring the protection and welfare of UNHCR staff members was of vital importance. He noted with appreciation the acknowledgement by the Division of Human Resources

Management of the commitment of UNHCR staff, but pointed out that their commitment had personal and professional costs. UNHCR must address the aspirations of its staff in the areas of job security, career development and staff welfare.

20. Under the new contract policy, the maximum length of contracts that could be offered to staff members who had worked for many years for UNHCR was five years. The UNHCR Staff Council was of the view that, once staff members had demonstrated their ability, they should, pursuant to the United Nations contracts policy, be offered a continuing contract which would meet their aspirations to stability and job security. He requested the support of the Executive Committee in promoting the implementation of a contracts policy which was adapted to the needs of staff and the organization. The situation of staff members working under United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) contracts, who were often recruited under precarious arrangements for extended periods, should also be regularized.

21. As far as career development was concerned, he noted that, in recent years, many General Service staff had expressed concern about their career development prospects. In particular, they had stressed that, when recruiting Professional staff, the organization gave preference to external candidates even when General Service staff with equivalent or greater qualifications or experience applied. The Staff Council pointed out that national staff formed the main institutional memory of the organization, which should only recruit external candidates when required competencies did not exist in-house. He urged UNHCR management to eliminate hurdles to the career advancement of General Service staff and to facilitate the career development of staff at large.

22. With regard to staff welfare, he pointed out that, in 2010, the General Assembly had abolished the system of designated administrative duty stations, designed to enable staff members to bring their families nearer to the operational areas. As a result, staff were currently forced to undertake expensive travel in order to visit their families. In addition, while 82 per cent of UNHCR staff members worked in the field, one third of international professionals rotated every year and more than half of all staff served in hardship duty stations, the International Civil Service Commission had made a proposal which would further undermine the welfare and rights of staff members. It had been proposed to cut mobility and hardship allowances, shipment entitlements, accelerated home leave for staff in hardship duty stations and allowances for single parents. While those measures had initially been meant to streamline the remuneration package of staff, they had turned into a cost reduction exercise that did not seem to take into account the welfare of staff working in the deep field and dangerous locations, which hindered the capacity of the organization to attract competent staff to those duty stations. The Staff Council called on the Executive Committee member States to carefully review the most adverse effects of the proposed changes to the rules on mobility and service in hardship and non-family duty stations.

23. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America) said that her Government, which recognized the professionalism of UNHCR staff, took note of the statement made by the Staff Council. In its cooperation with UNHCR, it would seek to examine the issues raised by Mr. Avognon.

24. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he had always considered the courage and determination of UNHCR staff members, in particular those who worked in remote areas, sometimes at the risk of their lives, as a source of inspiration. He added that a dialogue between management and staff was vital for the proper functioning of an organization and welcomed the openness demonstrated by the Staff Council in addressing difficult issues.

25. **The Chairperson** said that the Executive Committee applauded UNHCR staff for their courage and dedication. The Executive Committee counted on the Staff Council to keep it abreast of developments affecting staff.

Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2016

Consideration of the provisional agenda of the sixty-seventh session of the Executive Committee

26. **Mr. Srisukwattana** (Rapporteur) said that decision 2 on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2016 was a procedural decision which confirmed the framework adopted in 2004 with regard to working methods. The 2004 decision authorized the Committee to add or delete items as appropriate and invited Member States to meet in December in order to prepare a detailed plan. Under that decision, UNHCR was also called upon to be explicit and analytical in its reports to the Standing Committee and to submit documentation in a timely manner. The two other decisions were also procedural. Decision 3 concerned observer participation in the meetings of the Standing Committee in 2015 and 2016 and decision 4 concerned the adoption of the provisional agenda of the sixty-seventh session of the Executive Committee, in line with the 2004 decision. Decision 5 which referred to item 5 (a) of the agenda, concerned international protection and set out a series of topics to be considered during the period 2016-2017.

27. **The Chairperson** said that those decisions would be included in the annexes to the report on the current session to be submitted for adoption at the end of the session. With regard to decision 3, he informed the Executive Committee that several Member States had made an official request to participate in the meetings of the Standing Committee as observers, namely Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Panama and Paraguay. Those requests being in order, he proposed that the names of the States concerned should be added to the agreed text of draft decision 3.

28. *It was so decided.*

Election of officers

29. **Mr. Çarikçi** (Turkey) nominated Mr. Staur (Denmark) for the office of Chairperson.

30. **Mr. Batora** (Ethiopia) seconded the nomination.

31. *Mr. Staur (Denmark) was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*

32. **Ms. Londoño Soto** (Colombia) nominated Ms. McCarney (Canada) for the office of the first Vice-Chairperson.

33. **Mr. Quinn** (Australia) seconded the nomination.

34. *Ms. McCarney (Canada) was elected the first Vice-Chairperson by acclamation.*

35. **The Chairperson** said that the Asia-Pacific Group, which was responsible for nominating the second Vice-Chairperson, had yet to reach an agreement. He proposed that he should inform the members of the Executive Committee of the name of the candidate once it was known and that the candidate would then be elected by tacit approval.

36. *It was so decided.*

37. **Mr. Ngango** (Rwanda) nominated Ms. Habtemariam (Ethiopia) for the office of Rapporteur.

38. **Mr. Hadid** (Jordan) seconded the nomination.

39. *Ms. Habtemariam (Ethiopia) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

40. **Mr. Staur** (Denmark) said that he was honoured to have been elected Chairperson. He was aware that needs had been growing so fast that UNHCR was facing the worst shortage of resources in its history. He expressed the hope that UNHCR would soon master the challenge it faced, namely mobilizing both political will and funding.

Adoption of the report of the sixty-sixth session of the Executive Committee

(document without a symbol, distributed in the meeting room)

41. **Mr. Srisukwattana** (Rapporteur) briefly introduced the draft report of the sixty-sixth session. Sections I and II provided an overview of the work carried out during the session; section III contained the decisions adopted by the Executive Committee; and, lastly, the annexes contained the statement by the Executive Committee on the situation of Afghan refugees together with the summary of the general debate made by the Chairperson. The final version of the report would be submitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the annual report of the High Commissioner.

42. *The draft report of the Executive Committee on the work of its sixty-sixth session was adopted.*

Closing of the session

43. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), paraphrasing Jean Monnet, said that, for UNHCR, and the whole humanitarian community, what was important was neither to be optimistic, nor to be pessimistic, but to be determined. The Executive Committee had been clear about the five principles that should guide UNHCR reform: transparency, accountability, oversight, efficiency and innovation. He was committed to translating those principles into concrete actions. New methods would be needed in order to find new sources of funding. Ensuring more transparent use of funds and allocating more funds to specific programmes should help make that possible. At the same time, from the outset of crises, humanitarian action should be linked more clearly to action to promote development. In addition, the current humanitarian system remained largely inspired by the one that had been established after the Second World War; therefore, all its stakeholders must consider how it could be developed to make it truly universal, less focused on the West and more respectful of different cultures.

44. In such difficult times, there were also reasons for joy and hope. Asylum systems had improved in many countries. Since 2011, 48 States had acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and numerous national laws had been revised as a result. Solutions were still being sought to facilitate voluntary repatriation whenever possible and there were examples of successful resettlement, in particular on the African continent. At the same time, the need to support local communities hosting refugees or displaced persons was increasingly understood and taken into account. In particular, in recent weeks, leaders and the public in several developed countries had grown aware of the need for everyone to make a contribution. While it was normally difficult to include the refugee issue on the international agenda, in 2015, it was at the heart of all discussions at the General Assembly. That reflected the gravity of the crises the world was going through but was also an opportunity that UNHCR should seize.

45. After an exchange of courtesies, **the Chairperson** declared the sixty-sixth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees closed.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.