



General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 October 2020

Original: English

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 733rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 October 2020, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve(Belgium)
later: Ms. Farani Azevêdo(Brazil)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Štefánek** (Observer for the Council of Europe), speaking via video link, said that, under the European Convention on Human Rights, the States members of the Council of Europe had an obligation to guarantee the fundamental rights of everyone on their territory, including migrants and refugees. Although the principle of non-refoulement was not explicitly mentioned in the Convention, according to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights it was encompassed in articles 2 (Right to life), 3 (Prohibition of torture), 4 (Prohibition of slavery and forced labour) and 5 (Right to liberty and security). Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 to the Convention prohibited collective expulsions.

2. The position he occupied – Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees – had been established by the Council in 2016 as a response to the global migration crisis. The work of his office focused on the most vulnerable refugees. Following on from the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe (2017–2019), his office was developing a new action plan that would address vulnerable groups and had recently issued a handbook on family reunification. The Council had published a comprehensive analysis of the legal and practical aspects of alternatives to detention in the context of migration in 2018, followed by a practical guide in 2019 and an online course in 2020.

3. **Ms. Baghli** (Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) said that her organization welcomed the voluntary return operations conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in coordination with some States and hoped that the Rohingya community and other minorities would soon be able to return home. Her delegation called on the authorities of Myanmar to put in place the conditions for their safe, dignified and voluntary return.

4. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation had mobilized to help its member States deal with the pandemic. The Islamic Solidarity Fund had provided urgent humanitarian assistance, especially to the least developed member States, while the Islamic Development Bank had launched a strategic programme for preparedness and response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic of \$2.3 billion. Parties in conflict areas had been called on to declare ceasefires and allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance. On World Refugee Day, the Organization's Secretary General had commended member States, many of them developing countries, for hosting large numbers of refugees. He had emphasized the importance of coordinating effective efforts to cushion the adverse effects of the COVID-19 crisis on refugees and the need to address the root causes of displacement, drawing attention to its particularly adverse impact on women and children.

5. **Ms. Jagne** (Observer for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)), speaking via video link, said that West Africa continued to witness an unprecedented rise in population displacements, predominantly caused by insurgencies, internal crises and climate-induced disasters. There were now more than 7 million displaced persons in the region. To address the humanitarian situation, which had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, ECOWAS had developed short-, medium- and long-term initiatives. In the short term, humanitarian assistance was provided to vulnerable populations, especially those facing food insecurity, including displaced and refugee populations. ECOWAS would continue to mobilize additional funds to support those affected by the floods ravaging the region, particularly in the Niger, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Nigeria. In the medium and long term, the Commission was going through political, diplomatic and legal channels with a view to eliminating the drivers of conflicts.

6. ECOWAS was working to fulfil the pledges it had made at the Global Refugee Forum and looked forward to continuing its partnership with UNCHR to address some of the critical constraints and growing humanitarian needs in the Sahel region of West Africa.

7. **Ms. Pictet-Althann** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that the priorities of the Order's global coronavirus response plan were to sustain life-saving humanitarian operations and to help mitigate the harmful effects on the most vulnerable populations. Those in urgent need of humanitarian assistance received food and non-food items or cash and psychosocial support if needed. The Order was responding to COVID-19 and providing ongoing health care and other services in many regions, including Uganda,

Bangladesh, Colombia and Lebanon. The Order of Malta supported the appeals of the United Nations Secretary-General and other world leaders for a future COVID-19 vaccine to be seen as a global public good that was affordable and available to all and was committed to providing assistance for a fair, wide and equitable distribution of such a vaccine. The Order welcomed the recent announcement that UNHCR and Religions for Peace had decided to form a multi-faith council of leaders to tackle global displacement challenges, address the root causes of conflict and displacement and support peacebuilding.

8. **Ms. Conte** (Observer for the World Food Programme), speaking via video link, said that, in 2019, conflict, displacement, economic shocks and extreme weather events caused by climate change had been the underlying causes of acute food insecurity, affecting over 135 million people. In 2020, the global pandemic had further exacerbated the fragile food security situation, and her organization estimated that the number of people facing acute food insecurity could reach 270 million by the end of the year.

9. In July 2020, the World Food Programme and UNHCR had warned the international community that severe underfunding threatened to leave millions of refugees across Africa without food. For example, her organization had been compelled to reduce refugees' food assistance by 30 per cent in Uganda and by 50 per cent in Cameroon.

10. The use of cash transfers as a form of assistance continued to expand in refugee operations. The United Nations Common Cash Statement, launched in 2018, had improved complementarities and accountability between the participating agencies in the delivery of cash assistance, and common cash transfer mechanisms had been put in place in more than 25 countries. Under the Joint Programme of Excellence and Targeting Hub set up in 2019 to strengthen joint assessment and analysis by the World Food Programme and UNHCR, work was under way on programmes in eight countries, aiming to achieve an integrated humanitarian, development and peace response.

11. **Ms. Dimitriadou** (Observer for the World Bank Group), speaking via video link, said that her organization was committed to supporting hosting countries that had taken on the responsibility of caring for refugees. The resources available under the Global Concessional Financing Facility for middle-income countries and the eighteenth replenishment period of the International Development Association (IDA18) regional sub-window for refugees and host communities in low-income settings had provided much needed support to expand services and opportunities for refugees and host communities.

12. The World Bank Group was committed to ensuring that refugees and host communities were included in the Bank's COVID-19 response. To address the impact of the pandemic, \$1 billion in grants from the IDA19 window had been set aside for hosting communities and refugees. Resources were also available under the IDA19 fragility, conflict and violence envelope, which would help to increase support for countries of origin to address root causes, help mitigate the risks of crises, maintain core service delivery, or recover and transition out of fragility. The focus was not only on the volume of finance available but on results on the ground, such as continuity of education during the current crisis and support to health facilities. Her delegation was pleased to hear the widespread support for the work of the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement.

13. **Ms. Reale** (Observer for Save the Children International), speaking via video link on behalf of a wide range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), said that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a devastating impact on children worldwide, including displaced children. Her delegation wished to highlight three particular areas of concern. The first was an unprecedented education crisis. For the first time in history, an entire global generation had had its education disrupted. The longer children were out of school, the greater the risk that they would never return. The impact of school closures also further exacerbated the risk of gender-based violence and gender inequalities. Her delegation therefore called on the international community to launch a global COVID-19 education action plan that included the needs of displaced children.

14. The second crisis was in the area of protection. The pandemic had caused loss of livelihoods and income, resulting in deteriorating living standards and increased vulnerability to child labour, abuse, violence, early pregnancy and child marriage. COVID-19 quarantines had also removed access to social services and psychosocial support for vulnerable children, including displaced children. Despite the desperate needs, child protection was chronically underfunded in humanitarian responses. Her delegation therefore called on the international

community to prioritize and support child protection services and psychosocial support for all children, including displaced children.

15. There was also an asylum and resettlement crisis. As State borders closed to limit the spread of the virus, children still urgently needed international protection and access to durable solutions. Her delegation urged all States to ensure access for asylum seekers while adhering to public health protocols, establish more and better regular immigration pathways for children, expedite family reunification and put in place a plan to end immigration detention of children.

16. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that institutional partners played a fundamental role in the fulfilment of the UNHCR mandate. The Council of Europe provided human rights safeguards that were highly relevant for UNHCR, since it often worked in situations where the right of asylum and the principle of non-refoulement were threatened. In recent years, the World Bank had become an important partner, as both organizations worked to improve host countries' responses to refugee situations, including through the mobilization of resources and advocacy. ECOWAS was another important partner which carried out valuable work in a region that had experienced displacement crises. He thanked the Sovereign Order of Malta and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for their respective humanitarian efforts. UNHCR and the World Food Programme worked closely together and were making good progress in many areas. Welcoming the statement by Save the Children, he said that the Office's recent consultations with non-NGOs had produced important conclusions, including the need for UNHCR to expedite the reform of its funding arrangements with NGOs and to work more closely with national and refugee-led NGOs.

17. **The Chair** thanked the delegations that had spoken in the general debate. More than 130 delegates had taken the floor, including 30 who had spoken via video link. From their statements, it was clear that the world's support for refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons remained as strong as ever. The debate had been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. In response to the question of how to protect and assist refugees during the pandemic, the delegations had given a clear answer: it required a global response, anchored in international solidarity, that left no one behind. Some speakers had highlighted the importance of ensuring equitable access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment; others had emphasized that measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 must be temporary, proportional, balanced and in accordance with international law. Noting that the pandemic had not prevented people from embarking on dangerous journeys, delegations had stressed the need to tackle the root causes of those movements and to combat trafficking in persons. Concerns had been expressed about the global learning crisis, accompanied by the warning that the interruption of education had severe long-term implications for persons of concern. Alarm at the increase in reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence had prompted calls for UNHCR to redouble its efforts to protect women and girls.

18. Delegations had voiced concern at the record number of internally displaced persons worldwide. They had pointed out that while States were responsible for responding to internal displacement, the issue required as much global attention and collective action as that of refugees. They had stressed the need to build the capacity of refugee-hosting countries and had called for increased efforts to eradicate statelessness. Noting that funding for operations in Africa was not proportionate to the number of persons of concern in that region, delegations had appealed to UNHCR to raise the profile of underfunded crises and ensure that no crisis was overlooked. Some delegations had emphasized that voluntary repatriation remained the preferred durable solution for refugees and had expressed concern at the reported decline in voluntary repatriation in 2019. Delegations had recognized that resettlement remained a vital protection tool and had called for more countries to offer resettlement places for refugees.

19. UNHCR had been encouraged to broaden its donor base, while donor countries had been invited to increase their core funding, prioritize unearmarked funding and enter into multi-year agreements so that UNHCR might use its resources more effectively in response to unforeseen events. Many speakers had welcomed and encouraged the Office's cooperation with United Nations partners, development actors, the private sector and international financial institutions, which they viewed as an effective way of responding to protracted refugee situations and addressing the root causes of displacement. They had urged UNHCR

to ensure strong oversight and transparency, to continue its reform initiatives in the areas of budget reform, regionalization and decentralization, and to ensure the diversity of its workforce.

20. The High Commissioner's message that refugees and displaced persons should be included in every aspect of the pandemic response had been warmly received. However, ensuring the safety of persons of concern to UNHCR was more than a health issue. The global compact on refugees provided a clear road map on how to confront the array of challenges brought on by the pandemic and which could only be overcome through multilateralism, solidarity and strengthened international burden- and responsibility-sharing. As a number of delegations had observed, no one was safe until everyone was safe.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

21. **Mr. Doğan** (Turkey), referring to the statement made by the representative of Armenia at the Executive Committee's 729th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.729), said that his Government categorically rejected the baseless allegations regarding the involvement of Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It was not the first time that Armenia had resorted to incendiary language or levelled false accusations in an effort to conceal its unlawful acts. The Turkish statement had focused exclusively on humanitarian issues and had made no reference to Nagorno-Karabakh or Armenia.

22. Four Security Council resolutions reaffirmed the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and called for the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying Armenian forces in Nagorno-Karabakh. The failure of Armenia to withdraw from the territory of Azerbaijan was in violation of international law and of the resolutions of the Security Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Turkey fully supported the position of Azerbaijan, which was exercising its right of self-defence in order to protect its people and its territorial integrity. By contrast, Armenian forces were targeting civilians, of whom 25 had been killed and 126 wounded, and destroying infrastructure. Armenia had also fired missiles at the cities of Ganja and Mingachevir and had targeted the vicinity of Baku. The conduct of Turkey in respect of Nagorno-Karabakh had been consistent from the outset. It would continue to support a solution to the problem on the basis of international law within the framework of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

23. **Ms. Vorontsova** (Russian Federation), referring to the statement made by the representative of Ukraine at the Executive Committee's 731st meeting (A/AC.96/SR.731), said that while she supported the High Commissioner's request not to politicize the discussions, she was obliged to respond to the unjustified accusations that the delegation of Ukraine had levelled against Russia. Ukraine was attempting to shift the responsibility for a domestic political conflict that had led to the mass forced displacement of persons. Regarding the statement made by the Georgian delegation at the 728th meeting (A/AC.96/728), she reiterated that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were sovereign independent States and any criticism of the situation in those countries must be addressed directly to their authorities.

24. **Mr. Petrossian** (Armenia), referring to statements made by the representatives of Azerbaijan and Turkey at the Executive Committee's 729th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.729), said that his delegation categorically rejected the allegations made by Azerbaijan and Turkey, which were a smokescreen for the gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that had been committed during the recent attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh. Since the outbreak of hostilities, the civilian population and key infrastructure had come under brutal artillery and air attack. Amnesty International experts had identified the use of cluster munitions – indiscriminate weapons whose use in residential areas was internationally prohibited – by Azerbaijani forces in Stepanakert. It was clear that the aim of Azerbaijan was not only to inflict damage, but also to forcibly displace and ethnically cleanse the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. A humanitarian disaster was in the making.

25. Turkey continued to deny its military involvement and the transfer of foreign terrorist fighters to Azerbaijan; however, the facts stubbornly remained. On 6 October, the European Court of Human Rights had adopted an interim measure that recognized Turkey as a party to the conflict and called on it to refrain from actions that contributed to breaches of the rights of civilians under the European Convention on Human Rights, and to respect its obligations under the Convention. The people of Artsakh had the right to self-determination and to freely

decide their political status; however, the history of the conflict demonstrated that, unless Azerbaijan was restrained, they risked annihilation.

26. **Mr. Pisarevich** (Belarus) said that Belarus adhered to the calls for participants not to politicize the Executive Committee's discussions. It was therefore regrettable that the Polish and Lithuanian delegations had referred to the situation in Belarus in the statements made at the 731st and 732nd meetings, respectively ([A/AC.96/731](#) and [A/AC.96/732](#)). Those remarks constituted interference in the sovereign affairs of the Belarusian State and did not provide constructive input to the discussions.

27. **Ms. Myat** (Observer for Myanmar), referring to the statement made by the representative of Bangladesh at the Executive Committee's 731st meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.731](#)), said that the delegation of Bangladesh had made groundless accusations against her country. Repatriation could not be carried out by Myanmar alone; active cooperation was required from Bangladesh. The displaced population of Bangladesh included not only persons who had lived for years in Rakhine State, but also illegal migrants. It was thus necessary to carefully verify the identities of the persons concerned.

28. Myanmar pursued a policy of friendly relations with all its neighbours. However, no State could accept proposals that interfered with its sovereignty or internal affairs. Myanmar would thus not endorse any proposal that went beyond the agreed repatriation arrangements. Disinformation spread by terrorist groups, such as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, whose attacks had triggered the displacements in 2016 and 2017, and other elements that exploited the displaced persons for political gain had delayed the repatriation process. Nevertheless, over 350 persons had recently returned to Rakhine State voluntarily. The Government of Myanmar categorically rejected the use of the term "genocide" in reference to the situation in the country. The report of the Independent Commission of Enquiry of Myanmar had concluded that there was no evidence of any pattern of conduct that would constitute acts committed with genocidal intent.

29. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that a number of Governments in his country's region were in fact a cause of what they called the "Venezuelan crisis", which had resulted from the use of unilateral coercive measures imposed by the Trump administration with the sole purpose of undermining the democratically and legitimately elected President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The United States of America continued to destabilize entire regions with a view to confiscating the wealth of others, thus bringing about crises that displaced entire populations. As a result of the unilateral coercive measures, his country had lost 99 per cent of its foreign currency income, its foreign bank accounts had been frozen and it had lost access to oil refineries in the United States and Colombia. As a consequence, food, medicines and basic commodities were no longer arriving in the country, in the midst of the pandemic.

30. If the Governments in the so-called Lima Group were genuinely interested in finding solutions and alleviating the flow of Venezuelan citizens to other countries, they should at least engage with his Government, but they preferred to play into the hands of the United States and to destabilize his country.

31. **Mr. Hajiye** (Azerbaijan), referring to the statement made by the representative of Armenia at the Executive Committee's 729th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.729](#)), said that the current escalation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and peace enforcement operations carried out by the armed forces of Azerbaijan were not only a result of the long-standing occupation of his country's territory, but also a response to a series of recent attacks by Armenia. The Armenian representative had falsely alleged that Azerbaijan had carried out attacks against civilians but had neglected to mention that the Armenian armed forces were shelling cities and towns up to 300 km from the conflict zone and, according to recently released video footage, were launching missiles from residential areas, using civilians as human shields. Armenia was also attempting to draw other countries into the conflict. A senior military adviser to the Armenian Prime Minister had recently said in an interview that his country had planned to shell civilian areas to provoke panic. The Armenian accusations of use of mercenaries by Azerbaijan was baseless, but there was documented evidence that Armenians in the occupied territories had hired mercenaries from Middle Eastern countries well before the recent escalation of hostilities.

32. **Mr. Pakhil** (Observer for Ukraine), referring to the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation at the Executive Committee's 730th meeting

(A/AC.96/SR.730), said that since 2014 the United Nations General Assembly had adopted seven resolutions condemning Russian aggression and the temporary occupation of Ukrainian territory. Provocation on the part of the Russian Federation was the sole root cause of the conflict in Ukraine, which had resulted in the internal displacement of 1.4 million people and had left some 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.

33. **Mr. Billah** (Bangladesh) said that the representative of Myanmar had put forward falsehoods and fabrications. The Rohingya issue was not a bilateral question, but a problem internal to Myanmar. Myanmar had failed to meet its obligation under the bilateral agreement to create conditions in Rakhine State for the return of the Rohingya. Claims by Myanmar of its readiness for repatriation amounted to hollow promises. Would the Government of Myanmar grant United Nations agencies and international media access to the country to monitor the situation? There was no evidence to support the claim that 350 Rohingya refugees had voluntarily returned to Myanmar. If that was the case, why had the Government of Myanmar not verified their identities, while insisting on doing so for the entire Rohingya community? None of the 1.1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh had expressed a desire to return, as they had seen no improvement in the situation in Myanmar. He strongly rejected the allegation that terrorist elements were present in Bangladesh, which had adopted very stringent provisions against terrorist organizations and financing. The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar had found that there were reasonable grounds to conclude that there was a strong inference of genocidal intent on the part of the State and that Myanmar was failing in its obligation to prevent genocide.

34. **Mr. Doğan** (Turkey) said that Turkey categorically rejected the baseless and false claims put forward by the representative of Armenia to distort the facts of the conflict with Azerbaijan. Armenia had occupied 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan, causing the displacement of over 1 million people. It had recruited foreign fighters and did its utmost to change the demographics of the occupied areas. Turkey called for the immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of the occupation forces from Azerbaijan in accordance with international law.

35. **Mr. Petrossian** (Armenia) said that the discussion about the conflict between his country and Azerbaijan had no place in the Executive Committee. The Government of Armenia heeded the call of the High Commissioner to avoid politicization. Azerbaijan had attempted to annihilate the people of Artsakh in the late 1980s and early 1990s and ended up with several hundred thousand Armenians finding refuge outside Azerbaijan, many in Nagorno-Karabakh. At the time, Andrei Sakharov, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, had characterized the situation as a new Armenian genocide. Azerbaijan had failed then, and it would now again fail spectacularly.

36. *Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil), Vice-Chair, took the chair.*

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee

(a) **International protection** (A/AC.96/1200, A/AC.96/1208, EC/71/SC/CRP.7 and EC/71/SC/CRP.15)

37. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that the global compact on refugees had provided a vision of solidarity and the equitable sharing of responsibility to protect refugees and forcibly displaced persons. At the Global Refugee Forum, some 1,400 pledges had been made by a wide range of actors to give life to that vision.

38. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had put that spirit of solidarity to the test. The steps taken by States in response to the pandemic varied from highly humanitarian measures to the blanket denial of access to asylum and forced returns, which often ended tragically.

39. In such circumstances, it was vital for UNHCR to document its practices and to measure the impact the pandemic had on forcibly displaced persons and on its work in the field. It had thus made available a COVID-19 protection dashboard to inform policy and decision-making. According to the information it had gathered, 168 countries had fully or partially closed their borders at the height of the pandemic and about 90 had made no exception for people seeking asylum, and 113 had now resumed the operation of their asylum systems fully or partially.

40. Dozens of States had returned asylum seekers to their countries of origin, putting them at risk. Immigration detention was being used increasingly in an arbitrary manner by some States for asylum-seeking families and their children. Others had adopted special procedures to care for unaccompanied minors. Over 100 countries had adopted digital technologies for the processing of asylum claims and visa formalities, and some countries, such as Costa Rica, Turkey and Bangladesh, had recently shown high levels of generosity in welcoming refugees.

41. During her recent missions to host countries, the obstacles to returning people who were not in need of international protection to their countries of origin had been raised repeatedly. The credibility of the entire asylum system depended on making such returns possible.

42. She had in 2019 cautioned against efforts by some countries to externalize their asylum procedures to third countries, as externalization could amount to warehousing asylum seekers indefinitely, exposing them to danger and chain refoulement. UNHCR welcomed the European Commission's continued support for the right to seek asylum, its rejection of pushback and efforts to promote responsibility-sharing, as detailed in the recently released draft pact on migration and asylum.

43. Save the Children estimated that nearly 10 million children, including some 4 million refugees and displaced persons, might never return to school as a result of the pandemic, and lockdowns had led to dramatic increases in gender-based violence and a rise in discrimination, stigmatization and xenophobia encountered by refugees and displaced people.

44. As a result of the pandemic, the number of refugees resettled had been severely reduced, from over 100,000 in 2019 to under 12,000 in the first nine months of 2020. Scores of persons with emergency cases had, however, been resettled, despite the pandemic, and UNHCR was continuing to work to broaden resettlement opportunities, for example through the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative .

45. UNHCR remained steadfast in its support for voluntary repatriation, but in situations of protracted conflict such as in Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic or Myanmar, such repatriation would not be possible or safe until the root causes of flight were addressed. With the pandemic, some States had been reluctant to receive their own nationals, despite the right of citizens to return to their countries. With voluntary repatriation and resettlement producing few durable solutions, it was realistic to focus on inclusion, and more specifically, social inclusion in host countries. The provision of access to education, health services and employment was a top priority and one that could enrich local communities. UNHCR had been working with the World Bank and others to ensure that funds were available for development investment to mitigate poverty, inequality and conflict.

46. Many of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum related to protection and solutions, with a strong emphasis on education and social inclusion, and implementation of some of the pledges had been accelerated by the pandemic. For example, the pledge by the Government of Costa Rica to provide health insurance for 6,000 refugees had been largely fulfilled, and a programme for higher education for refugees and a workshop providing Arabic education for Syrian and Rohingya children were under way.

47. The technique of matching pledges with specific partners had proved successful in the execution of projects. The secretariat of the Asylum Capacity Support Group, Division of International Protection, had issued a guide on the working modalities of the Group to help match pledges with offers of support. Best practice models for such matches include collaboration between Canada and Mexico, France and Chad and France and the Niger, for support for asylum capacity. The global compact on refugees had prompted the introduction of new initiatives related to responsibility-sharing, including: the set-up of regional support platforms; the launching of the Clean Energy Challenge; the creation of a global academic network, which now had a dedicated secretariat; and increased collaboration with partners such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, local governments, refugee- and women-led organizations, intergovernmental organizations and faith-based groups. The "I Belong" global campaign to end statelessness within a decade had passed the midpoint. Some 400 pledges towards that goal had been made, but much remained to be done. Statelessness was notably different from other protection needs: it was resolvable with relatively simple changes in law and practice.

48. In addition to advocating for more resettlement places, for opportunities for safe and voluntary repatriation and for social inclusion, UNHCR had issued guidance in many forms to support the activities of UNHCR field operations. One example was the guidance on accountability to affected people, which promoted the meaningful inclusion of those UNHCR served in its protection work and accountability to local communities for execution of policies on age, gender and diversity. Another was the shortly-to-be-issued, first-ever UNHCR policy on gender-based violence, in a timely response to the global spikes in such violence linked to the social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. UNHCR had also issued guidance on how to address racism and xenophobia and on the legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters. Finally, digital technologies had proved valuable in efforts to provide remote access to asylum systems and referral and counselling services. UNHCR hoped to scale up its use of such technologies to provide more effective international protection.

49. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking also on behalf of Belarus, Cuba, Nicaragua, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, said that the ongoing attempts to exploit the issues of international protection, asylum and immigration for political purposes must be condemned; likewise, the political premise of securing a country's borders as the basis for not addressing human mobility issues must be rejected. The international community must respect unconditionally the inalienable right of each State to choose its own political, economic, social and cultural systems; that was a sine qua non of the peaceful coexistence of nations. It was important, as underlined in the global compact on refugees, for UNHCR and its partners to consider the root causes of human mobility, beginning with the imposition by powerful countries of unlawful coercive measures on developing countries, in violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. Voluntary repatriation of refugees in a safe and dignified manner remained the preferred solution in most cases. Fostering the conditions that would enable such voluntary repatriation should therefore remain a priority.

50. **Ms. Rodriguez Mancía** (Observer for Guatemala) said that Guatemala, through its national system for refugees, had afforded international protection mainly to nationals of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. In 2019, the migration authorities had introduced a regulatory framework to safeguard the rights of asylum seekers, including to education, work and identity, and to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children were not turned back at the border, deported or repatriated before their international protection needs were assessed. Under the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework, a Guatemalan technical team had identified three priority projects in the areas of social protection and employment and livelihoods with a view to strengthening the country's asylum system; international cooperation would be needed to carry out the projects. In February 2020, an agreement had been signed by the United Nations system in Guatemala, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Guatemalan Institute for Migration on providing support to migrants and persons in need of international protection through the specialized agencies.

51. **Mr. Bremberg** (United States of America) said that he commended those States that were working to meet public health requirements while observing the principle of non-refoulement and ensuring that refugees and other persons of concern were included in national COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Partnerships between refugee host countries and UNHCR, NGOs and international donors were particularly effective to find durable solutions for refugees that also benefited host communities. The improvements to national asylum systems made in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay were also laudable. He welcomed the updated UNHCR policy on internal displacement, which was timely, in the light of the growing number of internally displaced persons forced from their homes by conflict. Similarly, the United States welcomed the extension of the mandate of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement, and would continue to support the generation of actionable and innovative recommendations for improving the protection of and finding solutions for internally displaced persons. His Government participated in domestic and international initiatives to reduce violence, especially against women and girls and was pleased that its continued support had enhanced the timeliness, effectiveness and efficiency of the violence prevention activities of UNHCR. As part of the "I Belong" campaign to end statelessness, the United States continued to make progress on its pledges to advocate for the prevention and reduction of statelessness, to

provide humanitarian assistance through UNHCR to help protect stateless persons and to champion the goal of achieving nationality law reforms in the 25 countries that did not allow women to confer citizenship on their children on an equal basis with men.

52. **Mr. Dávalos** (Ecuador) said that the current regional situation was complex in terms of human mobility, especially given the 5.1 million Venezuelans who had fled their country. His country's legal system afforded protection to refugees and migrants and guaranteed them access to social, education and health services, on an equal footing with Ecuadorian nationals. The arrival of large numbers of people seeking international protection had nevertheless had a significant impact on the asylum system in Ecuador; therefore, in 2018, the Government had adopted a contingency plan on admissibility, which had made it possible to address the situation of those requesting international protection in a timely fashion. Since 2018, Ecuador had issued over 13,000 identity documents to refugees to facilitate their local integration into host communities. Nevertheless, the progress made was at risk of being undermined by the economic, social and public health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ecuador continued to take steps towards achieving the commitments it had made under the global compact on refugees, including setting up an arrangement that would facilitate the recognition of refugees' academic degrees. She appealed to the international community to support the Poverty Alleviation Coalition, which had committed to supporting Ecuador through the graduation model approach and thus help it to overcome the socioeconomic challenges of COVID-19 facing the refugee population.

53. **Ms. Flores Liera** (Mexico) said that, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mexico had deemed international protection to be an essential activity. In addition to processing requests for asylum, Mexico had continued to promote the inclusion of refugees in Mexican society, by giving them access to support programmes that took into account their specific needs. Specifically in the context of the pandemic, refugees had been afforded health-care services and opportunities for employment and schooling. The comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework had helped Mexico and other countries in the region to take joint action and assume shared responsibilities with regard to refugees. The activation of a support platform, as provided for in the global compact on refugees, had further boosted the capacity of the framework to respond to refugee needs.

54. **Mr. Gave** (France), recalling his Government's pledges at the Global Refugee Forum, said that it remained committed to bolstering protection for refugees living in France. The resettlement programme, which had been suspended in March 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, had recommenced operations in August, and France continued to work towards a more humane and more efficient asylum system, with the support of UNHCR. Over 300 hours of free legal aid had been provided to francophone countries that had requested it. Within France, an interministerial agency had set up a network of regional and local authorities to promote refugees' access to information. The Government had revamped asylum procedures and reduced the amount of time needed to grant refugee status; it had also specially trained protection officers to deal with the most vulnerable asylum seekers. Efforts were being made to harmonize regulations across France and partner countries, particularly in the context of a new European compact on migration and asylum, which was expected to introduce ambitious reforms for responsibility-sharing, the control of migration flows and measures to ensure assistance for persons who arrived in Europe with a clear need for international protection.

55. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom) said that he encouraged UNHCR to continue monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons of concern and to advise States on how to ensure access to asylum and services, while safely managing the spread and secondary impacts of the virus. He welcomed the roll-out of the updated UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy and looked forward to receiving the related global implementation and monitoring plan, including on such issues as the meaningful participation of women and girls in decision-making and disability-disaggregated data. The United Kingdom shared the view expressed by UNHCR regarding the timeliness of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement; it was more vital than ever to strengthen cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders in order to prevent, respond to and find solutions for internal displacement. To improve the protection of internally displaced persons, the United Kingdom had submitted a proposal to the Panel that a formalized institutional relationship should be fostered between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Organization for Migration and UNHCR, and the resident coordinators and humanitarian coordinators. In order for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to work more effectively on protection

outcomes, it should consider some specific or clearer roles and responsibilities for advancing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other standards pertaining to the protection of internally displaced persons. He welcomed the supporting role of UNHCR vis-à-vis humanitarian country teams to develop protection strategies through its role in leading protection clusters. While the core protection responsibilities of UNHCR related specifically to refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, the protection strategies of humanitarian country teams should encompass all individuals affected by humanitarian crises. It would be helpful for UNHCR to provide insights into how it had worked on humanitarian country team protection strategies to ensure that a broader assessment of protection risks was covered and how it had encouraged the whole humanitarian country team to implement them.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.