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Chairperson: Ms. Katharina Stasch (Germany)

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

3. Regional activities and global programmes *(continued)*

a. Regional updates *(continued)*

vi. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes *(continued)*

1. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes** (UNHCR), responding to the requests for more information on the Office's role in joint efforts to address the impacts of the drought in the Horn of Africa, drew attention to the fact that it was participating fully in the United Nations system-wide response in Somalia and Ethiopia, with cluster responsibilities for internally displaced persons; that it was leading the joint refugee response in Kenya and Ethiopia; and that the main focus was on the coordination, mainstreaming and prioritization of protection to ensure that assistance reached the most vulnerable. UNHCR was also working in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), among others, on a joint refugee response plan for the new emergency in Ethiopia, which was in urgent need of more funding. The Government of Ethiopia had abided by its commitment to refrain from establishing new refugee camps on its territory, and UNHCR was working with it at the federal and regional levels on the settlement of new arrivals from Somalia by means of an approach that incorporated access to health care and water for the refugees and the host community. Political advocacy to end the fighting in Somalia was key to enabling the refugees to return home – which was what the majority wanted – and, hence, to preventing a protracted crisis. Further briefings would be organized on the recently published regional drought appeal, which was in line with the inter-agency response plans and the appeals in the three countries most affected by the drought, and a new appeal would be launched for the Ethiopia situation.

2. On the question of how UNHCR was addressing the impacts of climate change, the Bureau was exploring options to work in partnership with climate stakeholders on adaptation, mitigation and resilience-building measures, and efforts were under way to improve data management and monitoring for the protection of populations displaced by droughts, flooding and extreme weather events.

3. Regarding the Ethiopia situation, UNHCR had assisted the Government in drafting its national internal displacement policy and strategy, while continuing to support the provision of humanitarian aid and working closely with local authorities to facilitate voluntary returns, as a result of which some 50,000 internally displaced persons had returned to northern Ethiopia in 2022; more would hopefully follow suit in the wake of the recently signed peace agreement. As to the Ethiopian refugees in the camps of eastern Sudan, not many had sought to return to date, but the country offices were monitoring the situation and preparing for it to change. Refugee registration and the issuance of identity cards had resumed in Ethiopia, and new standard operating procedures had been developed to assist refugees and returnees.

4. On the situation in Kenya, the Government had formed an interministerial committee to work with an inter-agency technical committee to support the implementation of the “Marshall Plan” – an ambitious five-year, multisectoral road map developed in conjunction with UNHCR and requiring significant levels of engagement on the part of donors, NGOs, development partners and the private sector. Additional support would be provided by a joint programme that UNHCR was developing with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and other key United Nations partners.

5. On the question of resource mobilization and development financing at the regional level, the Bureau agreed with those calling for more funding and a combination of more humanitarian resources, complementary development funding and greater engagement with the private sector to address the various challenges facing the region. Significant amounts had been mobilized to assist host countries in dealing with forced displacement situations, including from multilateral development banks and bilateral donors; examples of the support received had included allocations from the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships – for the Solutions Initiative for South Sudan and the Sudan and for solutions for Burundian refugees – and from the World Bank's International Development Association Window for Host Communities and Refugees financing mechanism. The humanitarian needs continued to grow, however, and as the investments to date would take time to have an impact, donors were urged not to prematurely reduce their humanitarian funding. UNHCR, for its part, would continue to support countries in better

tracking their development financing so as to ensure that it benefitted displaced populations and contributed to the costs of inclusion in national systems.

6. On the issue of returns to South Sudan, work had begun on the facilitation phase but not on promoting returns, and the Bureau was working with governments and partners as part of the “Pockets of Hope” initiative. Meanwhile, to prevent refugees from being forced to return to vote in the 2024 elections, UNHCR was working with UNDP and the United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan on an election-preparedness plan to facilitate their participation without leaving the host countries.

7. Further to the comments on gender-based violence and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the serious allegations of sexual misconduct at the Malakal protection of civilians site were deeply concerning. Gender-based violence remained pervasive in South Sudan and the consequences were compounded by unprecedented climate shocks, a deteriorating economic situation and harmful cultural practices, with women and girls bearing the brunt. UNHCR, as co-chair of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, was working to mainstream coordination and prevention measures into operations throughout the country. While the need for programmes to prevent gender-based violence was great, however, so was the problem of underfunding.

8. On the issue of disability inclusion, UNHCR recognized that there was more work to be done and remained committed to its continuation.

9. As to localization, local NGOs now accounted for 50 per cent of the Bureau’s partnerships, compared to 23 per cent in 2022, and their share of its funding had increased to 47 per cent, up from 19 per cent the previous year. National and local NGOs would feature prominently in the forthcoming NGO consultations to discuss the regional localization priorities for 2023, and refugee-led and community-based organizations would enjoy enhanced participation in coordination platforms at the regional and country levels.

10. On the risks to humanitarian workers, another three had lost their lives in South Sudan in the first three months of the year, and the fact that the second largest number of UNHCR security incidents in the world had been recorded in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region was a major concern. The Bureau continued to work closely with national and local authorities and communities to protect those delivering assistance to vulnerable persons.

11. On cash-based interventions, the Bureau was gradually increasing the use of cash, including within the framework of its drought response, and with some \$28 million having been dispensed to 1.2 million beneficiaries in 10 countries in 2022, the focus was now shifting to targeting. Rwanda and Uganda had initiated a targeting approach with WFP, with the support of the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme of Excellence and Targeting Hub, and other countries were likely to follow suit.

12. Lastly, the Bureau acknowledged the importance of freedom of movement and the need to build emergency preparedness and response capacity in the region.

vii. Southern Africa

13. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa** (UNHCR), drawing attention to the situational analysis in the update on the UNHCR operations in his region, described the displacement landscape as highly diverse – ranging from one of the world’s most protracted humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which accounted for over two-thirds of the persons of concern to UNHCR in southern Africa, through the camps and settlements in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where refugees had been living for decades, and the urban areas where displaced people had been integrated into host communities in the Congo and South Africa, to the mixed movements affecting Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

14. Humanitarian work in southern Africa was highly challenging owing to economic instability and social inequalities combined with the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, conflicts, climate change and food insecurity. The prevailing instability in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and northern Mozambique jeopardized the protection of communities owing to reduced access and the risks to humanitarian workers; southern African countries were vulnerable to the impacts of the war in Ukraine, ranging from food and fuel shortages to surging commodity prices, with over 43 million people having experienced acute food insecurity in 2022, and the food insecure population was expected to increase to 55 million by the end of that month; and, the loss of

life and destruction caused by the adverse effects of climate change, such as recurrent extreme weather events, were especially devastating for refugees and internally displaced persons.

15. Turning to the key achievements in 2022, the Bureau had continued to enhance protection capacity and solutions through the strengthening of asylum systems, while engaging with States and the Pan-African Parliament on a model law on nationality in Africa; supporting States in their efforts to achieve a 7 per cent reduction in asylum application backlogs; developing the capacity of partners and communities to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse; and assisting 18,300 refugees to return to Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

16. Further progress had been made in enhancing emergency preparedness and response capacity in the region, such as in Mozambique, where climate-resilient housing was built, infrastructure was repaired and the longer-term mainstreaming of protection into national systems was launched after the declaration of a level-2 emergency in the wake of Cyclone Gombe, and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the capacity for rapid deployment had been developed through emergency training courses organized for UNHCR and government and partner staff.

17. Progress had also been made in improving the social and economic inclusion of refugees, with 76,000 children, 48 per cent of them girls, having gained access to education and the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative having awarded scholarships to 396 young students; a new three-year programme having been launched to improve the socioeconomic conditions of 4,000 displaced persons and host community members in Mozambique; and 100 hectares of land having been made available to refugees and host communities by the Government of Zimbabwe. UNHCR regional partnerships with academia and development actors had resulted in, among other things, the adoption of a joint action plan with the Southern African Development Community to end statelessness, improve asylum systems and ensure economic inclusion; the training of 100 legal practitioners in refugee law and statelessness by the International Association of Refugee and Migrant Judges; and the connection of 1,500 households to the electricity grid in Mozambique through projects funded by the African Development Bank and the World Bank.

18. Regarding the priorities for 2023, the Bureau would continue to work with stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the 146 pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and prepare new pledges for the second global forum in December; support the inclusion of displaced populations through access to services and the mainstreaming of protection into national development programmes; strengthen the UNHCR emergency preparedness and response capacity through strategic partnerships and protection mainstreaming; and advance regional partnerships to bolster the protection response with the provision of multisectoral assistance.

19. The Bureau was concerned, however, that levels of funding had not kept pace with the previous year's significant increase in humanitarian needs. The reduction in contributions to UNHCR and WFP, for instance, had made the delivery of food assistance particularly challenging; the need to reprioritize operations in the region had never been greater; the Bureau had worked tirelessly to diversify the donor base and raise additional resources; and far more was needed to ensure the protection and alleviation of the suffering of millions of persons of concern. UNHCR was grateful to its existing donors and partners for the crucial support provided in 2022 and looked forward to continuing to work with them through 2023 and beyond.

20. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement of the European Union and its member States), drawing attention to the fact that the European Union and its member States continued to provide life-saving assistance to vulnerable people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including some 6 million internally displaced persons, commended UNHCR and its partners for having stayed and delivered in often difficult circumstances, such as the recent upsurge in violence perpetrated by non-State armed groups in the east of the country. Deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation, further aggravated by continued fighting, the European Union and its member States called on the parties to the Luanda and Nairobi agreements to abide by their commitments. It was crucial in protracted crises to operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in a more systemic manner, with local integration, in accordance with a people-centred and rights-based approach. UNHCR should step up efforts to ensure the registration of refugees and asylum-seekers in the wider region and the European Union and its member States, recognizing its lead role in the protection cluster and the fact that it was well placed to ensure effective data coordination in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, encouraged it to ensure that the robust protection monitoring system developed with its partners reflected the entirety of the data set available.

21. Noting with concern the fragile humanitarian situation in the province of Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, which continued to deteriorate owing to repeated attacks by non-State armed groups, the impacts of natural disasters and the ever-larger numbers of internally displaced persons, the European Union and its member States underscored the importance of an integrated approach in addressing the root causes of the crisis through humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, security and preparedness and response-related actions. The Office's advocacy for the inclusion of displaced populations in national service strategies and the mainstreaming of protection needs into development programmes was welcome, and the organization was encouraged to further coordinate and share relevant data with specialized development actors in order to increase levels of efficiency and leverage the comparative advantages of the various stakeholders.

22. The representative of **Portugal**, aligning her delegation with the European Union statement, drew attention to the factors causing the growing number of humanitarian emergencies in southern African countries, which ranged from climate disasters through food insecurity to conflict and gender-based violence. Her delegation commended UNHCR for its invaluable work in protracted or forgotten crises and paid tribute to the long-standing solidarity and generosity of the many African host countries offering protection and comprehensive responses to those in need.

23. On the protection crisis in Mozambique, the humanitarian situation in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, notwithstanding a recent reduction in insurgent attacks, remained a matter of concern and called for a comprehensive, sustainable approach including the provision of humanitarian assistance and financial support. Socioeconomic recovery, local community development and efforts to address the issues of social exclusion, inequality and unemployment were crucial to rooting out radicalization, particularly among persons in vulnerable situations. Her Government supported various programmes designed to provide economic opportunities for young people in Cabo Delgado.

24. The humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region was of growing concern. The increasingly adverse effects of climate change, in contributing to a deteriorating security situation that made it hard to build or maintain robust institutions and good governance, were making a dire socioeconomic situation even worse. Portugal, which had participated in United Nations and European Union strategic responses to the security crisis, supported the operationalization of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the coordination of all the actors involved. A purely military response would not resolve the humanitarian crisis, which required efforts to create the conditions to facilitate development, enhance food security and mitigate the effects of climate change, all of which relied on the ability of States to strengthen their presence and authority on the ground.

25. Portugal commended UNHCR and its partners for their support in ensuring that refugee children and youth had access to education, which was all the more crucial in times of conflict and crisis, as it contributed to protection and integration and strengthened the foundations for peacebuilding.

26. The representative of **Zimbabwe**, commending UNHCR for its work to address forced displacement situations in the southern Africa region, where the main drivers were climate-induced natural disasters, conflict and violence perpetrated by non-State armed groups, said that the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers called for coordinated action to promote self-reliance and livelihoods through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, underpinned by financial support. Her Government's support for sustainable livelihood projects was reflected in the recent allocation to residents of the Tongogara refugee camp of 90 per cent of the 100 hectares of arable land being added to the 50 hectares distributed to formerly marginalized persons under the fast-track land reform programme introduced in 2001. It also ensured that the refugees and asylum-seekers at the camp enjoyed the same rights as Zimbabwean nationals.

27. Her delegation, noting with concern that UNHCR, according to the update on its operations, only intended to prioritize the protection of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex refugees and asylum-seekers in its programming in southern Africa, requested clarification as to why it would not be doing likewise across the entire continent. Zimbabwe's position on such issues was well known and anchored in its laws, norms and cultural beliefs, and her Government was of the firm belief that the limited resources at the Office's disposal should be used for genuinely life-saving activities. Zimbabwe appreciated its continued collaboration with all partners on the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers.

28. The representative of **Morocco**, drawing attention to the fact that African countries continued to host 40 million forcibly displaced persons, hence a significant share of the total number of persons of concern to UNHCR in the world, said that more predictable and equitable burden- and

responsibility-sharing was needed, in keeping with the Global Compact on Refugees, to ease the mounting pressure on host community health and education systems. Solutions to displacement situations called for a holistic approach focusing not only on the provision of humanitarian assistance, but also on peacebuilding, security and sustainable development, with the involvement of local, regional and global actors, in close cooperation with governments and international humanitarian organizations.

29. Morocco welcomed the Office's efforts to raise awareness of the root causes of forced displacement and would continue to participate bilaterally and multilaterally in those aimed at addressing the various drivers, such as the effects of climate change and food insecurity. It looked forward in particular to the planned expansion of the Project 21 inter-agency protection monitoring system's joint analysis of the Sahel crisis to cover the affected coastal States.

30. The representative of the **United States of America**, noting the challenges faced in southern Africa in terms of complex population movements compounded by economic hardship, climate events and ongoing violence, commended the many countries that had hosted refugees for decades, regardless of the strain on local resources, for their leadership and generosity in keeping their borders open. The region was still in need of strong support, and the United States urged donors and development partners faced with competing global emergencies to maintain and expand their contributions for dealing with protracted refugee situations. His Government, for its part, would continue to provide UNHCR with flexible support to help to meet the immense needs.

31. In view of the importance of protecting refugees and asylum-seekers, the host countries that had reservations about some of the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees should reconsider their position, as many of those that had been confining refugees to camps and restricting them from working had so pledged at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019. Refugees had shown that they could support themselves and contribute to the economic health of their host countries, and the United States supported the Office's efforts to strengthen their self-reliance.

32. The increase in voluntary repatriations over the previous year was encouraging, as durable solutions were always the best outcome to a displacement situation, and UNHCR should strive to help refugees to return home wherever appropriate. The United States, as a nation of immigrants whose talents had brought immeasurable improvements, had expanded refugee resettlement opportunities in 2023 and called on other nations to do likewise.

33. On the issue of statelessness, the United States appreciated the UNHCR prevention work with southern African countries and commended the Government of the Congo for its progress towards acceding to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Eliminating statelessness in the region by 2024 would be a remarkable achievement.

34. The representative of **Zambia**, aligning itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African group, said that his Government, which had maintained its open-door policy, welcoming persons of concern from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia, among others, continued to monitor the volatile situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and stood ready to launch a rapid response plan in the event of any change; the efforts of UNHCR country offices to update their contingency plans accordingly were much appreciated. In the meantime, the Government also continued to seek durable solutions for the refugees that it was hosting, such as a large-scale assisted voluntary repatriation programme that had resulted in more than 10,000 having repatriated between July 2022 and January 2023. Its first national refugee policy to support all persons of concern was scheduled for approval in the coming months.

35. The representative of **Egypt**, aligning itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African group and expressing concern that countries in Africa, in spite of their limited resources, continued to bear the burden of hosting the growing numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, stressed the need for more equitable and sustainable burden- and responsibility-sharing, with a focus on not only providing funding and development assistance but also creating more opportunities for resettlement and complementary pathways; addressing the root causes of displacement; and paving the way for safe and voluntary returns. Emphasis must be placed on ensuring a favourable protection environment for all refugees, regardless of their nationality, age, gender, political affiliations and ethnicity, rather unnecessarily taking a non-consensual, categorization-based approach that served only to polarize the debate on issues on which Member States should be united. Coordination and cooperation with governments and sensitivity to the cultural and traditional contexts in which UNHCR was operating were crucial to the protection and welfare of refugees and their host communities. The organization should strive to enhance the interlinkages in its programming, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, adopting

a more innovative approach to “people on the move” and a more comprehensive strategy for dealing with mixed migration.

36. The representative of **Denmark**, aligning her delegation with the European Union statement, expressed concern about the large numbers of forcibly displaced persons in Africa and commended the host countries for their generous solidarity.

37. Denmark welcomed the agreement ending the conflict in northern Ethiopia and enabling the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need.

38. The many drivers of forced displacement, including conflict, food insecurity – exacerbated by Russia’s war in Ukraine – and the impacts of climate change, were interlinked and had to be addressed through a nexus approach; more comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable responses to forced displacement, with civil society and local and national governments at the forefront, were key to finding durable solutions. Denmark welcomed the UNHCR continued focus on engaging with development actors and its strong commitment to climate action and efforts to reduce environmental degradation in displacement settings, to enhance the preparedness and resilience of displaced persons and their host communities, and to develop a regional climate action plan for its operations in 2023 in West and Central Africa. It also welcomed the organization’s plans to scale up efforts to strengthen other key components of inclusive and sustainable responses, such as child protection and measures to prevent, mitigate and respond to sexual and gender-based violence. The second Global Refugee Forum in December would hopefully provide further opportunities for joint action and planning.

39. Denmark proudly supported the Office’s work in responding to humanitarian needs and seeking durable solutions, as both a major donor of unearmarked funding and a contributor of targeted funding for displacement situations in Africa, including in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

40. The representative of **Austria**, aligning his delegation with the European Union statements on all three Africa region updates, said that Austria was troubled by the numbers of persons forcibly displaced in southern African as a result of conflict and insecurity exacerbated by economic instability, social inequalities, climate disasters and food insecurity. Austria had provided substantial support to UNHCR in 2022 for its operations to assist and protect vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons in Mozambique and appreciated its work to empower communities with cash assistance and protect the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; assist in awareness-raising, registration and the issuance of identity documents; and organize capacity-building workshops and training courses, enhance protection mainstreaming and deliver core relief items.

41. Regarding the situation in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, his Government was deeply concerned about the millions of vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons and their host communities that continued to suffer from severe drought owing to the climate crisis, and it greatly appreciated the Office’s activities in enhancing the water supply to the targeted refugee camps affected by the scarcity. Austria also welcomed the cessation of hostilities agreement between the Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, which had enabled the delivery of humanitarian services to resume and internally displaced persons in the Tigray, Afar and Amhara regions to return home.

42. On the situation in the West and Central Africa region, Austria was alarmed by the previous year’s significant rise in the numbers of persons of concern and lamented the growing number of civilian casualties and displacement situations caused by attacks by non-State armed groups. It condemned those attacks and called on all parties to the various conflicts to comply with their obligations to respect – and ensure respect for – international humanitarian law in all circumstances, in particular the provisions prohibiting attacks against civilians and civilian objects. His Government had provided substantial support to UNHCR for its highly valued work in Uganda – Africa’s biggest refugee-hosting country – to provide protection, deliver food assistance, assist in community-led initiatives to identify malnourished children and ensure the registration of new arrivals. It was grateful to all host countries in Africa for their long-standing solidarity and generosity.

43. As a party to both United Nations statelessness conventions and a member of the group of friends of the #IBelong campaign, Austria welcomed all the measures taken to prevent and reduce statelessness and commended Kenya, in particular, for its decision to recognize the Pemba people as Kenyan citizens.

44. The representative of **Norway**, noting that southern African countries, especially those affected by conflict, continued to face major challenges with respect to gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence, said that Norway supported the Office’s ongoing efforts to strengthen

its coordination and programming for the protection of women and girls, including through the mainstreaming of risk mitigation into every area of its work. Norway also commended UNHCR for striving to address systemic discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities.

45. Concerned about the impacts of instability, social inequality, incessant conflict, climate disasters and food insecurity on the complex and long-standing humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, her delegation requested more information on the UNHCR assessment of the situation and whether it was preparing for a further deterioration in the situation and encouraged the organization to work closely with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement to address the large numbers of internally displaced persons in that country and in Mozambique.

46. Norway commended the southern African countries showing a strong political will to eradicate statelessness and urged those that had pledged to strive for that goal to strengthen their efforts to deliver on their commitment.

47. The representative of **Germany**, aligning his country with the European Union statement, expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its work to promote the inclusion of refugees in education and their access to livelihoods and encouraged it to remain fully engaged in tackling the issue of climate change-induced displacement.

48. On the situation in Mozambique, Germany was concerned about the deteriorating security situation and stark increase in internal displacement in the province of Cabo Delgado and called on UNHCR to further coordinate efforts to improve humanitarian access to internally displaced persons in the area.

49. Germany commended the countries and communities hosting displaced populations in the southern Africa region for their hospitality and applauded the progress made in paving the way for voluntary returns and other such solutions.

50. The representative of **South Africa**, aligning itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African group, said that her Government remained committed to providing support and solidarity to all those genuinely in need of protection from oppression, persecution and conflict; that in spite of its own challenges, it had maintained an open border policy; that it was striving to modernize its immigration laws to deal more efficiently with the increasing numbers of asylum applications, while working in partnership with UNHCR to eliminate the current backlog and deliver training for judges and legal practitioners, among others; and that measures were in place to enhance the self-reliance of refugees by providing them with land, housing and the right to freedom of movement, equal access to education, health care and employment. Displaced populations often lived in underdeveloped areas where sudden inflows of new arrivals added to the pressure on the host communities' infrastructure and ability to deliver basic services, however, and the South African model therefore relied on the strengthening of responsibility-sharing.

51. Her Government welcomed the Office's involvement in advancing the ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, and was working to incorporate its provisions into national laws and policies.

52. South Africa was committed to working with the international community to tackle the underlying causes of displacement and advance sustainable solutions, including safe and voluntary returns and resettlement, and it urged all nations to honour their international obligations under the Global Compact on Refugees and the United Nations refugee conventions.

53. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa** (UNHCR), responding to the various comments and concerns about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, said that with 600,000 persons displaced in 2022 alone, a further 110,000 added to the tally by February 2023 and the armed groups in the east having failed to honour their recent ceasefire agreement, it remained highly volatile. A United Nations Security Council mission had just been dispatched to assess the situation on the ground and, if it managed to gain access to the region, solutions would hopefully be found to ease the suffering of the displaced, in addition to which the recent visits by the Pope and President Macron of France, together with the mediation efforts of the presidents of Angola and Nairobi, might have helped to pave the way for a peaceful resolution to the conflict and a strong commitment to ending the attacks on humanitarian workers and protecting civilians, especially women and children, from being killed, kidnapped and/or subjected to sexual abuse; the country as a whole urgently needed that in the interest of its development. UNHCR counted on the European Union and others to deliver on their pledges of funding and in-kind support and, given

that more than \$2 billion was required for the 2023 humanitarian response plan, the international community was urged to increase its financial support to prevent any gaps in the delivery of life-saving assistance. In the meantime, UNHCR would continue to endeavour to facilitate the voluntary return of the displaced and the coordination of registration procedures in cooperation with partners such as IOM.

54. UNHCR was well aware of the importance of maintaining a heightened level of preparedness and remained constantly on the alert for any eventuality requiring a response, as reflected in the previous week's declaration of a level-2 emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The representative of Norway could rest assured that the organization was indeed working very closely with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement.

55. On the situation in Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique, access to the area remained difficult, and the crisis, as noted by the representative of Portugal, concerned development as well as protection issues. The support of development actors was therefore crucial, particularly in creating youth opportunities and disabusing them of the belief that they were being ignored by the Government; the World Bank had made available \$100 million, which could be transformative for the whole country.

56. Further to the comment on the Government of Zimbabwe's allocation of arable land to the refugees and host community of the Tongogara camp, UNHCR was pleased to note that it had also provided 4,000 tonnes of food assistance, thereby easing the pressure on WFP.

57. As to the representative of Zimbabwe's comment on the age, gender and diversity question, UNHCR would continue to regard it as a programming priority to mainstream the relevant risk mitigation measures into every area of its work in order to protect women and girls from gender-based violence and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities from discrimination. As an international protection agency, UNHCR had a duty towards all persons of concern, without discrimination.

58. On the need for a holistic solution to address the drivers of forced displacement, the representative of Morocco had rightly emphasized the central importance of peacebuilding, as reflected in the African Union's "silencing the guns" initiative, for peace was crucial to development and food security, and, without it, there could be no end to the poverty that led to fighting over scarce resources and rising numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees.

59. On the representative of the United States of America's comment on the countries with reservations about allowing refugees the right to freedom of movement and employment, UNHCR would continue to engage in dialogue with the governments in question with a view to persuading them to dispel them and consider durable solutions, such as voluntary repatriation. That would require more funding to enable UNHCR to facilitate the voluntary return of refugees and ensure that the conditions were conducive to their socioeconomic reintegration, which would, in turn, call for the involvement of development actors.

60. Lastly, progress on the issue of statelessness in the region had been encouraging, with not only the Congo but also Eswatini and Namibia on course to have eliminated it by 2024.

b. Global programmes

61. The **Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions** (UNHCR), introducing document EC/74/SC/CRP.3, said that the previous year had been shaped by multiple, simultaneous crises that had given rise to a diversity of daunting challenges and that refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons had been disproportionately affected owing to vulnerabilities that were particularly acute in urban settings. One key aspect of the Office's efforts to address the challenges had been the scaling up of cash assistance, which 90 per cent of the 100 million recipients had declared to be their preferred modality, and some 80 per cent had received it digitally. The new UNHCR policy on cash-based assistance for 2022-2026 placed greater emphasis on cash-based interventions as a means of promoting protection principles, strengthening socioeconomic inclusion and increasing access to national systems.

62. On the highly challenging issue of food insecurity, UNHCR had continued its work with stakeholders, including governments and civil society, to find more innovative solutions and its close collaboration with WFP to promote food security, self-reliance and inclusion had been expanded, resulting in a common vulnerability targeting approach for humanitarian assistance and national

social protection programmes implemented through the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub.

63. On efforts to improve the livelihoods and economic inclusion of displaced and stateless populations, UNHCR had worked in partnership with the World Bank to promote agriculture in Chad and insect farming in Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe as an innovative, low-cost and environmentally friendly approach to improving food security, employment opportunities and income generation for refugees and host communities. The results to date had been encouraging, and there were plans in place to expand the initiative to other countries in 2023. Further, the Poverty Alleviation Coalition had helped more than 74,000 refugees and host community households to emerge from extreme poverty in 2022.

64. In the field of education, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative scholarship programme had been newly implemented in Colombia, Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan and Slovakia, and over 8,300 refugee and returnee students had been enrolled in the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative scholarship programme globally. Primary enrolment rates, however, were worryingly low, and UNHCR was seeking to address the issue through the Education Above All foundation's "educate a child" programme, which had helped over 1.5 million out-of-school displaced children to gain access to primary education and to reduce drop-out rates. Enrolment rates at the secondary level were far lower, hence much more challenging. Meanwhile, some 225,000 children and 4,000 teachers were now benefitting from the expansion of the Instant Network Schools programme's connected education programme to 84 centres across six countries.

65. In regard to public health, the Office's comprehensive and varied range of services had included advocacy for the inclusion of refugees and displaced persons in the roll-out of national COVID-19 vaccination programmes, with over 10.7 million doses having been administered in 123 countries by the end of 2022. Efforts to address mental health and psychosocial support issues had remained a priority and a minimum service package developed in collaboration with the World Health Organization, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund had been endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

66. On the operationalization of development partnerships to address forced displacement, the progress made since the first Global Refugee Forum had, as recognized by participants in the previous year's High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, been significant. Examples included the launch of a joint initiative with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to create markets in forced displacement contexts and stimulate private sector engagement with refugees and host communities, capitalizing on the IFC's market intelligence and UNHCR expertise, operational presence and mandate; the forging of strategic alliances with a growing number of development partners – including international financial institutions and United Nations actors – to enhance protection, inclusion and efforts to find solutions; and increased engagement with the International Monetary Fund on the latter's strategy for fragile and conflict-affected States.

67. Regarding efforts to build resilience to climate shocks, initiatives had been implemented to render technical aspects of UNHCR humanitarian assistance more environmentally sustainable, including a collaboration with the United Nations Satellite Centre to develop mitigation strategies based on analysis of 30 settlements in the 15 countries most affected by climate shocks; efforts to accelerate transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, such as the newly launched "project flow" initiative to convert large-scale water systems to solar power; and the establishment of a refugee environmental protection fund to provide sustainable, scalable and long-term funding for reforestation and clean cooking programmes.

68. Recognizing the importance of adapting its global programmes to better support the displaced and stateless and their host communities, particularly in urban areas, UNHCR was currently undertaking the critical work of updating its urban policy and strengthening its partnerships with UNDP and UN-Habitat, among others, in the context of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. As the second Global Refugee Forum drew near, the organization reaffirmed its unwavering commitment to working closely with partners to enhance the resilience of refugees and host communities, and its determination to advance a comprehensive human settlements approach that prioritized self-reliance, health care, education, protection and climate risk mitigation.

69. The representative of **Egypt**, welcoming the Office's progress in the field of livelihoods and economic inclusion, as reflected in innovative solutions to improve employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and increase the self-reliance of refugees and displaced persons, expressed the hope that progress would continue and stressed that host communities, too, should be taken into consideration in the related activities in the interest of promoting social cohesion and

greater sustainability. UNHCR programmes should be aligned with host country development plans to ensure national uptake and avoid any conflict with or duplication of existing basic services.

70. Her delegation, while encouraged to note the continued support for cash-based interventions in the draft programme plan for 2024, was concerned about the large numbers of recipients engaging in negative coping mechanisms and called for further analysis, with a focus on the impacts of long-term dependency on refugee communities and, more generally, the sustainability of the programmes.

71. Egypt appreciated the Office's work to facilitate and promote the inclusion of refugee children in education and encouraged it to expand vocational training programmes to improve the prospects for labour mobility and complementary pathways; more information should be provided on the underlying role of education in that regard.

72. On food security, the fact that underfunding had led to food ration cuts, especially in Africa, was concerning, and the international community should respond accordingly. Food security and nutrition programmes should be aligned with national food and agriculture strategies, and include the participation of host communities in order to have a long-term impact.

73. Commending the efforts of governments to include refugees and asylum-seekers in public health systems, her delegation drew attention to the need for international assistance, including technical capacity-building, to enhance the services provided.

74. Egypt welcomed the Office's efforts to enhance the technical integrity of humanitarian responses in order to limit their environmental impact and mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. Having long called for efforts to break down the silos between climate change and water, it requested clarification as to the nature of participation of UNHCR in the 2023 United Nations Water Conference, particularly in the light of progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation) in displacement contexts. Her Government looked forward to further opportunities to enhance cooperation on global initiatives to tackle the various impacts of climate change on displacement and human mobility.

75. The representative of the **Netherlands**, welcoming the progress made in transitioning towards a stronger cash coordination model, said that the coordination mechanisms needed to include local actors so as to render them as accessible as possible and to ensure greater accountability to crisis-affected populations, including through responsive feedback. Cash-based interventions must serve to strengthen local protection systems without any duplication of activities.

76. In the area of health care, her delegation acknowledged the urgency and relevance of the Executive Committee conclusion on mental health and psychosocial support (conclusion no. 116 (LXXIII) 2022) and regarded the minimum services package as an important tool for embedding that support into the services provided to refugees and host communities.

77. The representative of **Germany**, stressing that the effectiveness of the Office's humanitarian response relied on having detailed data and vulnerability assessments and the ability to identify gaps, encouraged it to continue its work on integrating age, gender and disability considerations into all needs analysis.

78. UNHCR was to be commended for its new policy on cash-based assistance for 2022-2026, in particular the focus on financial inclusion, protection and greater accountability to crisis-affected populations. His delegation supported the innovations enabling beneficiaries to receive cash through digital means and mobile money accounts, as that would improve accessibility and security while boosting efficiency and effectiveness. More information would be appreciated on the transition to the new cash coordination model, which must be smooth, inclusive and context-appropriate.

79. In the field of public health, his delegation welcomed the finalization of the minimum services package for mental health and psychosocial support, as it would help to streamline service delivery in future crises, and it commended UNHCR for its endeavours to limit the environmental impact of operations in the implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene solutions.

80. In view of the increasing number and scale of emergencies, his Government supported the streamlining of emergency and preparedness packages and policies, and urged donors to increase the amounts of flexible funding provided to UNHCR so as to enable it to respond more rapidly. Lessons would hopefully have been learned from large-scale emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine and the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, and it was particularly important to have mechanisms in place to deal with simultaneous crises. Germany commended UNHCR for working jointly with partners to prepare for the rising number of climate-related crises and recommended a focus on anticipatory action models.

81. On the security situation, his delegation was grateful to the UNHCR staff and partners for their hard work in very difficult conditions, and emphasized the importance of safeguarding their physical and mental well-being.

82. The representative of the **United States of America** said that his Government considered it a policy priority to support refugees with dignified, market-based work opportunities and welcomed the Office's efforts to enhance refugee inclusion through innovative partnerships with development actors and the private sector. It also looked forward to the updated UNHCR livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy for 2023-2027 and to supporting with the strategy's development and dissemination.

83. It was encouraging to see cash-based interventions being continued at scale in a manner that responded to refugees' preferences and enhanced their long-term financial inclusion, and the efforts to track best practices and monitor the impacts of those interventions, including in terms of protection, were welcome, although it was concerning that a majority of recipients had reported being unable to meet their basic needs. Implementing the new cash coordination model was of the utmost importance, and UNHCR should continue to empower local partners in the transition process.

84. The United States welcomed the Office's strong advocacy for the inclusion of refugees and stateless persons in national health systems.

85. On the issue of food assistance, his Government called on other donor States to support the Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub.

86. The Office's efforts to integrate sustainable, climate-friendly approaches into its operations were particularly welcome, given the environmental threat faced by the displaced and stateless. The fact that work was under way to remove the barriers preventing access to housing and other services for crisis-affected populations, with a focus on the use of existing infrastructure, was encouraging. It was concerning, however, that some camps established as part of an emergency response had remained open for decades, even though many temporary shelters had exceeded their lifespan.

87. In the field of education, his delegation applauded the expansion of the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative scholarship programme and welcomed efforts to use technology to support teachers and improve the quality of classroom learning. UNHCR should prioritize the integration of refugees into national education systems and ensure that education financing mechanisms supported all children in any given country.

88. The representative of the **Philippines**, expressing support for MADE51 and other such initiatives aiming to equip persons of concern with the tools to achieve self-reliance, called on UNHCR to work with governments to ensure the necessary support and technical advice to include those persons in national systems, including social protection programmes. On the increase in cash-based interventions, his delegation requested clarification as to whether an updated post-distribution monitoring report would be released.

89. On public health, more information would be appreciated on the alignment of UNHCR programmes with the Executive Committee conclusion on mental health and psychosocial support, with particular regard to the objectives of improving accessibility, providing support for low- and middle-income countries, and promoting gender and disability inclusion.

90. Acknowledging the Office's efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change and reduce the environmental footprint of humanitarian operations in settlements, his delegation requested an update on how the specific needs of women, children and persons with disabilities were being taken into account in settlement planning.

91. The representative of **Uganda**, stressing the importance of the global programmes and projects covered in document EC/74/SC/CRP.3 in easing the pressures on host countries, in keeping with the Global Compact on Refugees, requested more information on the insect farming initiative launched with the World Bank, especially on the three locations concerned, and whether Uganda, as a major refugee-hosting country, might benefit.

92. On the cash-based interventions, her delegation welcomed the positive results achieved to date but expressed concern about the risk of recipients becoming dependent on them. It therefore urged UNHCR and its partners to help governments to develop appropriate transition plans that provided the support to promote long-term resilience. As credit schemes were more likely to foster a sense of responsibility, it was encouraging to see UNHCR, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Grameen Credit Agricole Foundation working to promote access to such schemes for refugees and host communities.

93. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed appreciation for focus of UNHCR on the inclusion of refugees in national systems, as it would help to increase access to services and protection frameworks, build self-reliance and facilitate social cohesion in host communities, which was a more sustainable approach than supporting so many of them with humanitarian assistance designed for short-term emergency responses. Welcoming the organization's role in promoting the transition to a new cash coordination model, the focus on cash-based interventions, which served to advance humanitarian system reform while empowering the recipients, and the increased use of digital means to distribute the cash, her delegation requested more information on the types of cash assistance provided, their effectiveness in comparison to other forms of intervention, and the risks and opportunities for various groups in receiving their payments digitally.

94. In the field of education, UNHCR should prioritize – and track global progress in – joint efforts to remove political barriers and further the integration of refugees into national school systems. The research carried out with the World Bank on forced displacement and education was welcome and would hopefully translate into programmatic action.

95. Regarding food security, the United Kingdom encouraged UNHCR to further its collaboration with WFP.

96. On public health, the Office's work to enhance and improve the provision of mental health services was important, given the detrimental impacts of displacement on well-being. The same was true of its work on water, hygiene and sanitation solutions, which were key to the good health of all displaced persons and the safety and dignity of women, girls and other at-risk groups. The United Kingdom was grateful for the clear accountability framework for the water, hygiene and sanitation sector provided by the UNHCR-UNICEF Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children, and it encouraged UNHCR to speed up its efforts to assume its responsibilities, focusing specifically on harmonized programming and the Sphere minimum standards. In view of the importance of being able to transfer responsibility for water, hygiene and sanitation services to others when it became necessary to reduce the need for sustained humanitarian funding, an update from UNHCR on its work to increase its partnerships with the relevant development actors across the humanitarian-peace-development nexus would be appreciated.

97. The United Kingdom commended UNHCR for its continued commitment to green initiatives and encouraged it to continue to seek innovative ways to measure and reduce the carbon emissions of infrastructure-heavy emergency operations.

98. The representative of **Switzerland**, stressing the importance of targeting and prioritizing the Office's commitments in a context of limited resources and noting that its work on livelihoods and economic inclusion effectively reflected the discussions at the previous year's High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, expressed appreciation for the fact that the organization was cooperating with experienced partners to draw on their knowledge and financial resources rather than trying to "reinvent the wheel". The next step would be to scale up best practices and apply them more systematically where relevant, such as in the context of strategic partnerships.

99. Cash-based interventions were an increasingly important component of humanitarian work and his Government, which was following their development closely, welcomed the work under way to compare the various modalities. It was concerning, however, to learn that 74 per cent of recipients had reported that the assistance provided had not met their basic needs and that 72 per cent had indicated that they had engaged in negative coping mechanisms. His delegation requested more information on how UNHCR interpreted those findings and whether the new policy on cash-based assistance for 2022-2026 contained any measures to address them. It was also keen to know with which organizations UNHCR was working to implement its strategy to include refugees in national systems, as well as how – and in what contexts – cash-based interventions had helped refugees and other persons of concern to gain access to public services.

100. In the field of education, it would be useful to have further details on the nature and added value of the Office's frontline international initiatives.

101. In the light of the mounting challenges to food security, exacerbated by the impacts of climate change and the conflict in Ukraine, his delegation encouraged UNHCR to continue to develop its collaboration with WFP; and in view of its concerns about food ration cuts owing to a lack of resources for operations in Africa and Asia, more information would be appreciated on the scale and duration of the restrictive measures and their immediate consequences, especially for children.

102. It was encouraging to note that the work of UNHCR in the United Republic of Tanzania had enabled refugees to gain access to public health services thanks to an approach that should be scaled up and extended to other countries.

103. Regarding the Office's efforts to make infrastructure greener and more resilient, his delegation urged it to further apply the lessons learned in the urban environments where growing numbers of displaced persons were hosted.

104. Lastly, Switzerland commended UNHCR for its efforts to address gender-based violence as part of its camp coordination and camp management role, although greater collaboration with United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other actors was needed to tackle external factors, such as human trafficking by organized criminal groups.

105. The **Director of the Division of Resilience and Solutions** (UNHCR), responding to the various comments and questions on cash-based interventions, said that a great deal of data had been gathered through post-distribution monitoring, which could be shared with Member States at a specific briefing, and that work was under way with numerous partners to increase the self-reliance of beneficiaries and address the policy issues preventing their access to livelihoods, such as restrictions on running a business.

106. On the questions regarding the insect farming initiative, the initial roll-out had taken place in Malawi, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, and there were plans in place to expand the project to other countries. Further details would be provided to interested governments.

107. Concerning education, there was a clear call for the integration of displaced persons into national systems but that required additional funding, to which end UNHCR would continue to work with the World Bank to consider how to assess and finance the associated costs.

108. Lastly, UNHCR would also continue to strive to improve mental health and psychosocial support; further details would be provided on the greening of its infrastructure; and the High Commissioner would be participating in the upcoming United Nations Water Conference.

c. Emergency preparedness and response

d. Security of the UNHCR workforce and operations

109. The **Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply** (UNHCR), presenting the two sub-items, said that UNHCR, after declaring 35 emergencies in 2022, was already responding to new crises in 2023, such as the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, the further influx of refugees from Somalia into Ethiopia and the internal displacement situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her division was currently working on over 19 country operations involving the implementation of critical preparedness measures in situations where there was a high risk of additional displacements. Strengthening the organization's global preparedness and response capacity was therefore a major priority. The new UNHCR policy on emergency preparedness and response, which had a strong focus on risk analysis and contingency planning, described the use of simplified, expedited procedures in operations in the areas of supply, partnership agreements and human resources, and the newly launched emergency preparedness and response portal offered access to guidance, templates, tools and updates on regional hazards and risks, including those associated with the impacts of climate change.

110. The UNHCR enhanced emergency deployment mechanisms aimed to ensure that the right people were deployed to the right places at the right time, and global emergency training capacity had been doubled to meet the demand, in addition to which the organization could rely on the collaboration and commitment of its 20 emergency standby partners. In view of the ongoing structural interruptions linked to supply, coupled with inflation and concurrent emergencies, UNHCR had to transform its supply chain to ensure the swift provision of sustainable services by simplifying processes for its workforce and partners, enhancing its response and delivery capacity, particularly in emergencies, and reducing its environmental footprint. Deployment of the new enterprise resource planning system, together with the supply strategy that was currently under review, would facilitate the transition and guide the future work of the supply workforce.

111. Climate action remained a primary focus, and UNHCR was planning to incorporate sustainability considerations into all supply-related activities, such as ensuring the use of greener core relief items, considering social and economic factors in sourcing those items and procuring more sustainable goods and services. In prioritizing proximity procurement wherever possible,

UNHCR was not only reducing its delivery costs and the associated carbon emissions but also supporting local economies; and in lowering its costs, its sustainability undertakings would also be making it possible to provide life-saving support to more of those forced to flee.

112. UNHCR continued to consider the security of its staff a key priority. Standard operating procedures for critical incident management would be revised over the course of the year, and guidance would be developed in liaison with the Staff Health and Well-being Service to support employees that were victims of domestic violence. Meanwhile, the security management learning programme for senior managers working on high risk operations would continue to deliver training throughout the rest of the year; the women's security awareness training programme, which had recently been extended to Ukraine, would continue to be expanded; and training in person-centred approaches to security management had been delivered primarily to locally recruited staff, who often happened to be the first responders. Having always attached great importance to the security of its partner organizations' staff, too, UNHCR would continue to build on that support and develop tools for them through its work with sister humanitarian agencies on issues of mutual benefit, such as United Nations civil-military coordination and access.

113. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement) commended UNHCR for its tireless efforts to respond to new and escalating emergencies around the world, noting that its robust emergency preparedness and response system, including its declaration and deployment mechanisms, had been put to the test as forced displacement situations became more frequent, complex and protracted. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine had triggered the fastest growing and most extensive displacement situation in the Office's history, with over 15 million people having been forced to flee their homes. The European Union, for its part, had launched a major operation under its Civil Protection Mechanism and contributed essential logistical support in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova through the European Humanitarian Response Capacity, which also provided expertise in health and logistics and helped to pre-position stockpiles of emergency items in critical areas. The European Union and its member States commended UNHCR for having rapidly scaled up its response in Ukraine and the neighbouring countries hosting refugees, as well as for the real-time review that had served to support the further enhancement of emergency deployment mechanisms and procedures. UNHCR response systems had yet again been stretched to the limit in the wake of the recent devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, and the European Union had again mobilized the same emergency response mechanisms as in the Ukraine crisis.

114. The European Union and its member States, noting the UNHCR revised policy on emergency preparedness and response, looked forward to receiving more information on the key principles, the new ways of working and the simplified emergency procedures, as well as on the newly forged synergies with other United Nations agencies.

115. With respect to capacity-building, it was encouraging to learn that the UNHCR emergency team leadership programme had provided training on behalf of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to other humanitarian organizations.

116. On the question of supply management, the European Union and its member States welcomed the Office's tireless efforts with local partners and donors to pre-position and transfer life-saving items in a timely manner, which had proved particularly useful in Ukraine. More must be done, however, to ensure that those in urgent need of support received it, especially in frontline and hard-to-reach areas.

117. Lastly, the European Union and its member States requested clarification as to how UNHCR aimed to develop its expertise in natural disaster- and climate-induced forced displacements, including through potential partnerships, and how it viewed its comparative advantage over other actors in the field. As the current chair of the Platform on Disaster Displacement, the European Union advocated for coordinated action to address displacements caused by natural disasters, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, and its member States stood ready to foster exchanges and collaboration with affected countries.

118. The representative of the **United States of America** expressed appreciation for the measures taken by UNHCR to continue to strengthen and streamline its emergency response by focusing on preparedness, planning and partnerships, as outlined in its revised policy on emergency preparedness and response. The organization's real-time evaluation of its emergency response in Ukraine was an example of its commitment to improving both its accountability to beneficiaries and staff and the overall effectiveness of its operations. His delegation welcomed the establishment of new

partnerships to enhance risk analysis and contingency planning for the immediate and long-term consequences of climate change and natural disasters.

119. Noting the significant increase in emergency deployments, his delegation requested clarification as to whether the emergency surge deployment support systems still met the requirements in terms of field security, training, mental health and other duty-of-care services for international and local staff; how emergency deployments were readjusted after the initial stages of an emergency; and how the protection of vulnerable groups, especially children, was prioritized in the preparedness phase and the earlier stages of an emergency response.

120. On the security of the UNHCR workforce, the United States, extending its condolences to those that had lost loved ones in dangerous situations, paid tribute to the humanitarian workers risking their lives to help others – and commended UNHCR for its commitment to stay and deliver – in disaster and conflict settings. The United States also appreciated the organization’s analysis of the range of factors affecting staff safety and security, the mental health resources that it made available to staff globally and its commitment to increasing diversity among field security staff. Concerned about the 30 per cent increase in the number of security incidents affecting UNHCR staff from 2021 to 2022, however, his delegation requested more information on the incidents and those targeted, with data disaggregated by gender and according to whether they were local or international staff, together with an overview of broader security trends. Further details would also be appreciated on the Office’s capacity to provide surge staff for emergency operations; on the consequences for the field locations that had even temporarily lost experienced security staff in an emergency; and on the extent to which the organization was collaborating with – and reporting incidents to – the Department of Safety and Security. His delegation encouraged UNHCR to ensure that the resources allocated to duty of care, including mental health support, remained in keeping with the needs of surge staff.

121. Welcoming the women’s security awareness training and the progress made towards gender and diversity goals for field security officers, his delegation was keen to know what percentage of UNHCR field security officers were women and what percentage were from the global South.

122. The representative of the **Philippines**, noting the previous year’s developments in UNHCR emergency preparedness and response activities, as reported in document EC/74/SC/CRP.4, acknowledged the demands placed on the organization by the growing number and scale of emergencies, and expressed appreciation for the principle of a people-centred approach that took into account the rights and special needs of persons of concern. His delegation would be keen to see the inclusion in future updates of a breakdown of the types of emergencies, the number extending beyond the six-month duration of a level-1 declaration, the number anticipated as being high risk and the scope of the interventions.

123. Emergency preparedness and response activities should be carried out in tandem with – or supplement – national efforts, with a continued focus on building partnerships with governments and other stakeholders while working within the United Nations development system. Paying tribute to the Office’s responses in the context of natural disaster- and climate-induced displacements, his delegation encouraged the organization to continue to work with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, including in the coordination of preparedness and mitigation efforts.

124. On the security update provided in document EC/74/SC/CRP.5, his delegation expressed concern at the 30 per cent increase in incidents involving UNHCR staff, including demonstrations against the organization at various offices around the world, and took note of the efforts to improve security management, such as through the integration of security considerations into operations, capacity-building for staff and the continued implementation of the plan of action to strengthen a global culture of security. Member States should abide by their obligations under the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and standards of accountability and responsibility should be extended to the non-State actors and armed groups posing a threat to the well-being of humanitarian workers. Security was a key aspect of humanitarian work that deserved more attention, and governments and other stakeholders would have an opportunity to develop initiatives and make commitments to that end at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum.

125. The representative of **Switzerland**, noting the key measures taken by UNHCR and its partners to strengthen its emergency preparedness with early warning systems and capacity development, called on UNHCR to enhance cooperation with specialized actors in order to better anticipate crises and take the appropriate preventive measures.

126. On the security of UNHCR staff during operations, Switzerland noted with concern that regardless of the preventive measures in place, the number of incidents occurring on a daily basis was increasing owing to the deterioration in the security situation worldwide. UNHCR should therefore share its good practices and contribute to the development of enhanced security measures within the United Nations system. Ensuring the security of its partners' staff was a major challenge that would become all the greater with the increasing efforts to implement the organization's localization agenda. His delegation therefore requested that future updates cover the issue of duty of care towards local personnel, with an explanation of the measures taken on their behalf.

127. The representative of **Uganda**, applauding the dedication of the UNHCR staff that put their humanitarian work before fears for their own safety, especially in emergency situations, stressed that every humanitarian crisis was an emergency and that while UNHCR, according to document EC/74/SC/CRP.4, had facilitated some 500 emergency deployments in 2022, some 300 of them had been in response to the situation in a single country, leaving the rest of the world to share the remaining 200. Her delegation therefore requested clarification as to whether that was because the funding provided by partners had been earmarked, in which case it might be advisable to stipulate that contributions for emergencies should in the future be unearmarked, or whether emergencies were considered more important in some regions than in others. The fact that there were new emergencies in the world did not mean that those in her region had ended. On the contrary, refugees and asylum-seekers had continued to enter Uganda to escape conflict, instability or drought in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and South Sudan, and her Government was concerned that, while it had become standard practice to commend Uganda for maintaining its open-door policy or for being the region's leading host country, the document contained not a single reference to the protracted emergency that it had endured for many years. Indeed, it was not cited as a level-2 or level-3 emergency in the overview of emergencies and policy implementation, whatever the difference might be between the two levels.

128. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, commending UNHCR for having continued to strive to carry out its mandate in the face of the deteriorating conditions in rapidly changing operational environments, welcomed the approach of factoring security into operational planning and defining accountability at all levels of management within the organization. The United Kingdom supported the focus on providing end-to-end assistance for its workforce, welcoming in particular the provision of mental health services and psychosocial support. Noting the increase in security incidents in 2022, her delegation encouraged UNHCR to continue to invest in security management measures, including training and learning.

129. The United Kingdom was supportive of the Office's work in monitoring the implementation of its gender parity action plan across the organization, in ensuring the diversity of its workforce and in providing security awareness training for women.

130. The **Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply** (UNHCR) expressed appreciation for the words of encouragement and support for colleagues working at high risk duty stations and in deep field locations.

131. Responding to the comment on the difference between the three emergency levels, UNHCR declared a level-1 emergency when preparedness actions were required to build a springboard for an effective response, a level-2 emergency when a crisis was growing deeper, and a level-3 emergency when it called for a whole-of-organization approach. The High Commissioner had declared a level-2 emergency in response to the increased influx of refugees into Uganda from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2022, and more information could be provided on the subsequent outcomes if so requested.

132. On the key principles of the UNHCR policy on emergency preparedness and response, emphasis was placed on ensuring that operations were people-centred; on working with host country governments so that the Office's actions were complementary to the support that it received; on recognizing the pivotal role of country operations in the context of regionalization and decentralization; on adhering to the principle of "do no harm"; and on acting on a "no regrets" basis. Other core components included the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, protection from gender-based violence, duty of care and the diversification of partnerships. It was important to invest in pre-deployment training so that the Office's deployment scheme remained fit for purpose, and the reason for doubling the emergency training capacity had been to cater for the growing numbers of volunteers joining the emergency response roster. Trainees would learn the full meaning of the term "emergency response", how to access information on duty-of-care issues and how better to prepare

for work in the field, including through courses on security management and simulation exercises to meet the UNHCR requirements for colleagues assigned to high risk duty stations.

133. On the question of how UNHCR adjusted the number of deployments after the initial stages of an emergency, the newly revised policy on emergency preparedness and response encouraged operations to consider the post-emergency transition period from the outset, focusing not only on the possible adjustments to the structure or staff, but also on the operations' self-sufficiency beyond the six or nine-month duration of an emergency declaration.

134. On child protection, which was key to any engagement, preparedness planning for operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Armenia, for instance, had included a focus on that issue and on the prevention of gender-based violence. UNHCR relied on community-based support and the assistance of refugee volunteers to identify protection risks and prepare case management analyses that were better attuned to the needs. The support and assistance that it had enjoyed in the Syrian crisis amounted to a good practice that had been replicated in other emergency situations.

135. On the question of partnerships in the area of emergency preparedness, UNHCR was working closely with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Preparedness and Resilience on the analysis of potential risks and efforts to bring them to the attention of other such entities as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group. Other examples included its ongoing collaboration with WMO on the joint assessment of newly emerging risks associated with climate change and natural disasters, as well as its much appreciated partnership with the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism in the Ukraine crisis and other large-scale emergency situations, such as in the aftermath of the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic.

136. On the question of the UNHCR comparative advantage as a protection agency in the area of climate change, the organization was leading efforts to assess how the impacts of the crises, such as drought in the Horn of Africa region, might affect the protection of displaced populations and how the protection response could be mainstreamed into the actions of the wider humanitarian community. In doing so, it was addressing a wider range of issues than those related only to food security or water, hygiene and sanitation.

137. The **Head of Field Security Service, a.i.** (UNHCR) said that the number of security incidents had increased the previous year owing to the fact that the workforce had grown larger, that more offices had been established, many of them in outlying areas, and that the quality of reporting had improved. Of the 335 incidents recorded for 2022, 191 had had an impact on men and 141 had had an impact on women, although it should be noted that some incidents might not have been recorded owing to issues of confidentiality and consent. Sixty-four per cent of the incidents had targeted local staff.

138. On the extent of UNHCR collaboration with the Department of Safety and Security, the organization continued to work closely with the Department of Safety and Security to develop security risk management processes, support the wider United Nations security management system and ensure that the appropriate mechanisms were in place to provide staff with end-to-end assistance.

139. Security training for staff at every level, from the global to the field, was a major priority for UNHCR – as well as a significant challenge, given the increasing size of the workforce – as it made it possible to identify the colleagues to deploy to emergency operations.

140. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Operations** (UNHCR), concluding the discussion on regional activities and global programmes under agenda item 3, expressed appreciation for the words of support for UNHCR and its partners around the world and highlighted some of the common threads.

141. Funding must be made available to address both new and protracted displacement situations, in spite of the increasing financial constraints, for underfunding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global impacts of the war in Ukraine had, as described by the representative of Uganda and the Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, led to a drastic rise in poverty levels among refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Every opportunity must be taken to reduce their dependency on humanitarian assistance, to which end several speakers had stressed the importance of self-reliance and socioeconomic inclusion while also commending UNHCR for the quality of its partnership with development actors. UNHCR was striving to mainstream engagement with those actors from the outset of a crisis, and it was working

with growing numbers of them to enhance protection, inclusion and solutions for the forcibly displaced, the stateless and their host communities.

142. Agriculture had the potential not only to improve food security and nutrition but also to foster economic development, UNHCR was advocating for refugees to have greater access to land and was working closely with partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Business Fights Poverty network, to support and expand climate-smart agricultural production and market access across a number of countries. More must be done, however, to better link the injection of development resources to a gradual reduction in humanitarian needs and an increase in self-reliance. Collaborating with development actors to that end was a priority for the years ahead.

143. Appreciation had been expressed for existing regional support platforms, which played a pivotal role in sharing the comprehensive and cohesive regional approaches that were key to the search for solutions.

144. Speakers had repeatedly referred to the adverse impacts of climate change on displaced populations and the directors of regional bureaux had provided specific examples of actions taken to address them. The representative of the United States of America's appeal to donors and governments to prioritize funding for climate mitigation activities was welcome, but the provision of that funding should not be to the detriment of existing programmes.

145. A number of speakers had referred to the situations in Afghanistan and Yemen, and UNHCR appreciated the repeated calls for aid and support to uphold women's rights and the security of female colleagues there. It would continue to deliver that aid and support, in spite of the challenges, and regular reports would be provided on what had been possible to achieve. In the absence of a political process, however, the long-term prospects for impactful humanitarian action remained limited.

146. While the overall situation undeniably remained challenging, the discussions at the current meeting had reflected a shift in thinking, and the second Global Refugee Forum would be another opportunity to share not only the burden but also the responsibility.

Statements made in exercise of the right of reply

147. The representative of **Algeria**, recalling that his country had been accused the previous morning of having obstructed the registration of Sahrawi refugees in the camps of Tindouf, said that the obstructions actually lay in the fact that the country levelling the accusation – the aggressor in the Western Sahara situation – had repeatedly refused to comply with its clear obligations under international law, as referenced in successive United Nations Security Council, such as when the country in question had prevented the Personal Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General from travelling to the territory under its occupation.

148. The representative of **Morocco** said that Algeria had regrettably disregarded its international obligations in transferring jurisdictional powers for its territory to an armed separatist group, leading to the militarization of the Tindouf refugee camps, the training of militia and the enlistment of children, in violation of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The fact that a host country should fail to safeguard the humanitarian nature of such camps was unacceptable. Further, the registration of refugees was crucial to the Office's efforts to provide persons of concern with protection and to prevent the politicization of humanitarian assistance, and Morocco was pleased to note the 60 per cent increase in the numbers registered in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2022. Algeria, however, was the only State in the region not to have taken part in that legally and morally binding exercise, and his delegation urged UNHCR to shed light on the obstructiveness of the Algerian authorities.

149. The representative of the **Russian Federation**, responding to what he described as politicized, unjustified, attacks on his country by a number of speakers, said that his Government was concerned about the fate of refugees in the Donbass region and seeking to protect the population in the Russian regions of Donbass Luhansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson, and that it was acting in response to Ukraine's aggression and refusal to ensure respect for human rights, cease its discrimination against Russian speakers and comply with its commitments under the Minsk agreements. Ukrainian nationalists and armed forces had provoked a Europe-wide refugee crisis, and the Russian Federation was a major host country, with more than 5.3 million refugees having voluntarily sought safety on Russian territory since 18 February 2022; UNHCR staff could see for themselves the effectiveness of its efforts to receive them. His Government rejected the allegations of the forced displacement of Ukrainian citizens and kidnapping of children, which were politically

motivated and baseless. Only orphans had been taken into institutional care, while those separated from their families had been placed in the care of Russian citizens and, far from preventing them from making contact with their families, every effort would be made to reunite them as soon as possible, regardless of where they came from. More than 100 children had returned home since the Donbass, Luhansk, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions joined the Russian Federation as a result of the referendums of late September 2022.

150. The representative of the **United States of America**, expressing deep concern at the Russian Federation's remarks about "stateless persons" and issuing Russian passports to so-called "new residents of the Russian Federation", described the unlawful transfer and deportation of protected persons, including children, as a grave breach of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 and a war crime. Mounting evidence of the illegal, brutal actions led against those protected persons in Ukraine laid bare the aims of denying and suppressing Ukraine's identity, history and culture. Russian claims to have annexed Ukrainian territories through referendums condemned and rejected as illegal by more than 140 Member States of the United Nations did not justify imposing Russian nationality on Ukrainian citizens. The devastating impacts of the war on Ukraine's children and their families would be felt for generations, and the United States would stand with Ukraine for as long as it took to seek accountability for the appalling abuses.

151. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, deeply concerned by the Russian Federation's deliberate mischaracterization of its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, said that his Government had been clear and consistent in its view that the sham referendums held on sovereign Ukrainian territory had been a blatant violation of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Russian Federation had no legal claim to those territories, which were and would always remain Ukrainian.

152. As to the steps to impose Russian nationality on Ukrainian citizens, which further evidenced the Russian Federation's attempt to suppress and erase Ukrainian identity, history and culture, the United Kingdom was deeply concerned about the implications for children, in particular, given that issuing them with Russian passports might be paving the way for their adoption. His delegation called on the Russian Federation to refrain from any actions preventing children from being reunited with their families or the forcibly displaced from returning home to Ukraine.

153. The United Kingdom stood by the people of Ukraine in the face of the Russian Federation's illegal, unprovoked attacks and would do its utmost to ensure that those responsible were held to account for the suffering caused.

154. The representative of **Sweden** said that the European Union and its member States strongly condemned the imposition of Russian citizenship on – and issuing of Russian passports to – Ukrainian citizens of the regions under the temporary military control of invading Russian troops. The European Union and its member States firmly rejected and unequivocally condemned the illegal annexation by the Russian Federation of Ukraine's Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions and would never recognize the legality or falsified results of referendums that had been engineered to serve as a pretext for the further violation of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; the results were null and void and had no legal effect and the regions in question, together with Crimea, remained part of Ukraine. Pursuant to decision (EU) 2022/2512 on the non-acceptance of travel documents of the Russian Federation issued in Ukraine and Georgia, the systematic issuance of Russian passports in the occupied regions constituted a further infringement of international law.

155. The European Union and its member States, reiterating that the only way to end the plight of Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe was for the Russian Federation to immediately cease its aggression and withdraw from within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, urged the Russian Federation to facilitate immediate and unimpeded access for UNHCR to all Ukrainian citizens, wherever they might be.

156. The representative of the **Republic of Moldova**, joining those expressing serious concerns about the remarks of the Russian Federation referring to "stateless persons" and so-called "new residents of the Russian Federation", recalled that United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/ES-11/1 on aggression against Ukraine had clearly reaffirmed that no territorial gains made through the threat or use of force could be recognized as legal. Her Government therefore strongly condemned the Russian Federation's annexation of the Ukrainian territories illegally occupied by Russian military forces and stressed that it must cease the issuance of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens, which constituted an escalation of the illegal war that it was waging against their country

and an attempt to legitimize its abusive occupation of another State's sovereign territory. Moldova reiterated its staunch support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

157. The representative of **Nicaragua**, calling on the United States to use official United Nations terminology when referring to his Government, said that politicized language hindered discussion of the issues on the UNHCR agenda, adding that unilaterally imposed coercive measures were in violation of international law and served only to hinder the socioeconomic development of the countries targeted, exacerbating displacement crises and undermining the rights of the persons of concern.

158. Nicaragua was a republic with a legitimately elected Government and a foreign policy based on respect for self-determination, state sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and the fostering of peace.

159. The representative of **Ethiopia** informed the Committee that, as part of his Government's efforts to implement the peace agreement signed on 2 November 2022, as attested by the African Union's monitoring, verification and compliance mission, humanitarian workers had been granted unimpeded access to the conflict-affected areas of northern Ethiopia; that services disrupted by the conflict were now being restored; and that measures were being taken to ensure accountability and redress for the victims of alleged violations of humanitarian and human rights law and to pave the way for reconciliation. His delegation was therefore deeply disappointed by some of the comments addressed to UNHCR and the Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes in regard to the overall country-level strategy, which were inconsistent with UNHCR and the Committee's mandate. The delegations concerned would hopefully take note of the improved humanitarian situation in northern Ethiopia.

160. The representative of the **Sudan** said that comments made the previous day about alleged restrictions and delays in the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Sudan amounted to misinformation, as the allegations were false, and there was no evidence to the contrary in any UNHCR reports. Government directives lifting any restrictive measures that might have hindered humanitarian operations in the country and allowing freedom of movement for all accredited organizations upon notification had been in place since 2019, since which time there had been no requirement to seek prior permission.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.