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Summary record of the 688th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 October 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Comissário (Mozambique)

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

High-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation (continued)

1. **Mr. Agalga** (Ghana) said that the Afghan Government was to be commended on its efforts to address the political and other factors that had forced Afghans to flee their country and he called on the international community and donor agencies to redouble their efforts to assist the Government in that task and thereby tackle the root causes of the refugee problem.
2. **Mr. Chanda** (Zambia) said that there was a need to provide Afghan refugees with durable solutions; that required the cooperation of all stakeholders, including local and national authorities and development partners.
3. **Mr. Manicom** (Canada) said that voluntary returns should be carried out with due regard for domestic and international law and with consideration being given to each person's particular circumstances. Canada, which had welcomed thousands of Afghan refugees over the years, called on host and resettlement countries to put forward plans for providing permanent solutions for those refugees.
4. **Mr. Sadigov** (Azerbaijan) said that half of the 1,500 refugees and displaced persons in Azerbaijan were Afghans and that the Government of Azerbaijan met their needs, including in the areas of health and education. A total of 14 Afghan refugees had been granted Azerbaijani nationality and a further 104 had received temporary residence permits. The Government also provided assistance to the Government of Afghanistan, but joint efforts with neighbouring countries were required to yield meaningful results.
5. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation) recalled that Afghanistan remained one of the largest countries of origin of refugees in the world. According to the latest figures, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran were host to 2.7 million and 2.5 million Afghan refugees, respectively. There were, in addition, more than 800,000 displaced persons in Afghanistan. The Russian Federation was actively helping Afghans: in 2014, it had contributed \$2.6 million to UNICEF projects for Afghan children living in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2015, it had made a voluntary contribution of \$100,000 to UNHCR towards aid projects for Afghan refugees in that country. Furthermore, the Russian Federation was host to 30,000 Afghans.
6. **Mr. Ishikane** (Japan) said that the repatriation of long-term Afghan refugees was key to stability in the region. Japan had played a leading role in securing aid for Afghanistan with the holding of the first Tokyo Conference in 2002 and the second in 2012. To date, it had allocated approximately \$2.5 billion to assistance for Afghanistan.
7. **Mr. Toros** (Turkey) said that, in 2014, Turkey had been the country which had hosted the largest number of refugees in the world. Afghan nationals accounted for 25 per cent of the irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey. Turkey called on the international community to conclude the resettlement process of all refugees, particularly Afghans, as soon as possible and to increase the resettlement quotas for vulnerable Afghans.
8. **Mr. Hall** (Greece) said that from January to August 2015 1,352 Afghans had applied to Greece for international protection, which represented an increase of 6.3 per cent compared to the previous year. The authorities had noted that, for the past several years, Afghan refugees had accounted for the largest number of non-accompanied minors. Furthermore, a growing number of Afghans applying for international protection were Hazara, who appeared to be increasingly marginalized and persecuted in their country. Another feature of Afghan asylum seekers as a group was the fact that

many of them had lived and had even been born in the Islamic Republic of Iran; it was therefore very difficult for the authorities to determine their status and to assess the risk of persecution they would face if they returned to Afghanistan. The level of violence in some areas was also difficult to determine because the situation was prone to abrupt changes.

9. **Ms. Bard** (Sweden) said that Sweden had received approximately 10,000 Afghan asylum seekers since the start of the year, of whom 6,600 were unaccompanied minors, a threefold increase over the previous year. Afghanistan was the main recipient of Swedish development assistance, and the Government intended to allocate some \$1.2 billion in aid to it until 2024. Sweden welcomed the reform plans presented by the Government of Afghanistan.

10. **Mr. Kumar** (India) recalled that India had welcomed 11,500 Afghan refugees. It had established a comprehensive development partnership with the Government of Afghanistan in the areas of infrastructure, education, health and vocational training, among others, with a view to creating an enabling environment for employment and livelihood opportunities for the people of Afghanistan.

11. **Ms. Menéndez Pérez** (Spain) said that she endorsed the statement made by Luxembourg on behalf of the European Union. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees provided a comprehensive framework for putting an end to three decades of displacement for Afghans. Spain, which had allocated €310 million to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, through bilateral programmes and multilateral contributions, including €15 million in 2015, would continue to provide assistance to the new national unity Government and for the purposes of the Transformation Decade.

12. **Mr. Kára** (Czech Republic) said that the Czech Republic contributed to the concerted international support effort for Afghanistan and was involved in 10 development projects; in addition, it provided the Government of Afghanistan with direct sectoral budgetary assistance. It was ready to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Afghanistan and endorsed the operational implementation of the Solutions Strategy.

13. **Mr. Wu** (China) said that it was important to encourage the voluntary return and durable reintegration of Afghan refugees and that the international community should support the process. China, which had always supported the peace process in Afghanistan, was involved in the reconstruction efforts undertaken by the Government of that country and ensured that the best use was made of the resources allocated to that end.

14. **Mr. Auajjar** (Morocco) said that protection and the search for solutions were complementary and indivisible. The regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees provided a framework for developing and improving intervention programmes that were tailored to the needs of the refugees in the three countries concerned with a view to preparing their sustainable and dignified return. The international community should, for its part, set up appropriate funding mechanisms until the conditions for sustainable return were achieved.

15. **Mr. Batora** (Ethiopia) said that Ethiopia aligned itself with the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. It was convinced that greater involvement by development actors would lead to the sustainable return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

16. **Mr. Burski** (Poland) said that Poland aligned itself with the statement of the European Union. The overall volume of aid provided by Poland to Afghanistan since 2001 was \$39 million. In 2016, Poland would continue to contribute financially to the

World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and to the United Nations Development Programme's Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan. Afghan refugees in Poland were eligible for social insurance benefits and received work permits.

17. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that Jordan welcomed the solutions put forward regarding Afghan refugees, namely support for voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration and assistance for host communities.

18. **Mr. Braithwaite** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the programmes for Afghanistan implemented by the United Kingdom focused on support for government structures and institution building, economic growth and the provision of basic services and humanitarian aid.

19. **Ms. Riachi Assaker** (Lebanon) said that Lebanon welcomed the cooperation between Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan with regard to refugees.

20. **Mr. Vestergaard Knudsen** (Denmark) said that he wished to express his condolences to the families of the victims of the hospital bombing in Kunduz. Denmark supported the multi-year framework contained in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, whose objectives should be incorporated into bilateral and multilateral programmes. Afghanistan would remain the primary beneficiary of Danish development assistance.

21. **Mr. Wilden** (Australia) said that since 2001 Australia had allocated over 1 billion Australian dollars in official development assistance for Afghanistan. It supported the project implemented by UNHCR and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to set up a health insurance scheme for more than 220,000 refugees and endorsed the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. In the past five years, Australia had granted some 9,000 permanent visas to Afghan refugees.

22. **Mr. Fasel** (Switzerland) said that he wished to express his condolences to the families of the victims of the hospital bombing in Kunduz. Switzerland had adopted a development assistance programme for Afghanistan entitled "Remaining committed" (*Rester engagé*) and would continue to work closely with the various governmental organizations involved in the return and reintegration of exiled Afghans.

23. **Ms. Laurin** (France) said that France associated itself with the statement of the European Union. The international community should remain committed to providing assistance to the Afghan refugees still living in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran and supporting Afghanistan on the path towards greater stability, prosperity and democracy. It was imperative to initiate, as soon as possible, development efforts that were based on strengthening the rule of law, equality for all and sound economic governance.

24. **Mr. Vos** (Netherlands) said that the Netherlands aligned itself with the statement of the European Union. It was now contributing to the Resolute Support Mission in Mazar-e Sharif, having joined the International Security Assistance Force in 2002.

25. **Mr. Kim** (Republic of Korea) said that the Republic of Korea supported the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. In addition to financial support, it provided very tangible assistance, notably help with the construction of wind turbines by UNHCR in Aqrabat in Bamian district.

26. **Mr. Reaich** (New Zealand) said that New Zealand had provided Afghanistan with security, diplomatic, development and humanitarian assistance. To date, nearly 2,000 Afghan refugees had resettled in New Zealand.

27. **Mr. de Crombrughe** (Belgium) said that Belgium associated itself with the statement of the European Union. It continued to carry out concrete actions, such as contributing to the Power Distribution and Purchase Agreement through the Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund and supporting the implementation, with the Afghan security forces, of an action plan for the release and reintegration of child soldiers. Belgium had supported education in Herat, Kapisa, Wardak, Logar and Kunar provinces and had financed the justice service delivery project, the design of the UN Women's Development Results Framework 2014-2017 and the emergency support programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Belgium had also taken part in mine clearance operations in northern Afghanistan. Furthermore, it was involved in the Resolute Support Mission in Mazar-e Sharif, which was aimed at helping the Afghan security forces ensure security throughout the country.

28. **Ms. Dia Sow** (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that the Economic Community of West African States endorsed the statement made by Rwanda on behalf of the African Group. The adoption of the sustainable development goals was an opportunity to reflect on the issue of the funding and organization of humanitarian action.

29. **Mr. Chikh** (Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)) welcomed the close cooperation that had developed in recent years between UNHCR and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for the benefit of the world's refugees. The Organization had set up a support fund for the socioeconomic development of Afghanistan with a view to providing Afghan refugees assistance in health and education. The Secretary-General of the Organization had travelled to Afghanistan in January 2015 to recall that the search for durable solutions was vital to ensuring the right to a life of dignity.

30. **Mr. Tickner** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that only coordinated and concerted action, undertaken in a spirit of partnership, would make it possible to respond to the current situation, which was the result of a series of crises that had been ignored for too long. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies urged governments to implement resolution 3 of the Thirty-First International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent on migration, in particular by ensuring that the relevant laws and procedures were in place to ensure that the national societies could enjoy effective and safe access to all migrants, without discrimination and irrespective of their legal status.

31. **Mr. Mukhtar** (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that promoting agriculture and food security was a central condition for resilience and development in many countries in the region. In 2005, FAO and UNHCR had signed a joint letter on strengthening cooperation, in which they had noted the need for stronger linkages between humanitarian, rehabilitation and development assistance. Ten years later, with protracted displacement having become the new norm, efforts to create an enabling environment for host communities, refugees and displaced communities were no longer sufficient and should be reinforced, specifically by forging local and international partnerships. Accordingly, FAO supported the Solutions Strategy for Refugees. In Pakistan, under the One UN Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) Programme, FAO had provided 25,000 Afghan refugee households with training in a number of innovative agriculture techniques in a bid to revive the agricultural sector. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, FAO had collaborated with the UNHCR country team on developing a programme of projects designed to empower Afghan refugees in the country with a view to helping them integrate into the host country society and improve their relations with host populations.

32. **Ms. Jerger** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the World Food Programme had been collaborating with UNHCR on the provision of humanitarian

assistance to Afghan refugees for nearly 30 years. In 2014, the conflict along the border with Pakistan had forced WFP to reduce the budget allocated to reintegration assistance for Afghan refugees in order to provide food aid to those displaced in the Afghan provinces of Khost and Paktika. In Pakistan, WFP, which had discontinued food support for Afghan refugees approximately 10 years previously, now focused its efforts on supporting the programmes of the Government of Pakistan, which was committed to eliminating hunger and assisting all vulnerable persons. Thanks to the generosity of donors, WFP continued to boost the resilience of Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran, including by distributing food rations to families whose children attended skills training courses organized by UNHCR.

33. **Ms. Ashrafi** (Association for the Protection of Refugee and Internally Displaced Women and Children), speaking on behalf of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), said that Afghanistan did not have the necessary economic and social infrastructure to cope with the local population and those returning to the country. Moreover, the country was experiencing growing insecurity and the proliferation of radical groups in the western and northern provinces. It should also be noted that neighbouring countries, which continued to welcome Afghan migrants and asylum seekers, were themselves facing growing economic problems, which jeopardized the integration of Afghan refugees in their territory and reduced host community tolerance towards them. Since its launch in 2012, the UNHCR Solutions Strategy for Refugees had not yielded the expected results in terms of supporting host countries and improving the situation in Afghanistan. She nonetheless commended the efforts of UNHCR over the past three years to coordinate international aid. She also commended the actions of countries hosting Afghan refugees, in particular the recent decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran to allow all Afghan refugees living in the country to have access to health-care services.

34. **The Chairperson** said that he wished to thank Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran for the welcome extended to him and his delegation during their visit in preparation for the high-level segment. He was especially grateful to the President of Afghanistan, who had received them in order to set out the difficulties facing his country and present his vision for a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan. He had travelled to Kabul and Herat, where he had met with Afghan returnees. There was a need to ensure that returnees should have access to a livelihood, education and health care. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, he had observed with immense satisfaction that all Afghan refugees had access to health care. He called on the international community to help Afghan returnees to rebuild their lives and their country, in particular by addressing insecurity.

35. He read out the draft statement of the Executive Committee on the Afghan refugee situation. He said he took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the statement.

It was so decided.

36. **Mr. Alemi Balkhi** (Afghanistan) said that he wished to thank the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Chairperson of the Executive Committee and the secretariat of UNHCR for drawing the international community's attention to the plight of Afghan refugees by holding the high-level segment. He also wished to express his gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for hosting millions of Afghan refugees for more than 30 years and permitting them to exercise their rights. He was also grateful to the representatives of the United States of America, Australia, the European Union, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union, as well as all the delegations that had taken part in the discussions. Lastly, he thanked the international humanitarian organizations, especially the International Organization for Migration, and all the States who had made it possible for Afghan refugees to live

in dignity. He renewed the call for increased cooperation to ensure that voluntary repatriation respected the dignity of refugees. He was sure that the countries which provided support for Afghan refugees would pursue their efforts. Afghanistan would shortly present a project on the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, which was based on a five-year plan and included an improved voluntary repatriation plan and actions to achieve solutions. It would also outline the institutions involved in the project and the financial resources needed for its implementation.

37. **Mr. Rahmani Fazli** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that he hoped that the statement adopted by the Executive Committee on the Afghan refugee situation would mark a watershed in efforts to support the voluntary repatriation of the refugees and their reintegration into Afghan society and the economic recovery of Afghanistan. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Iran to assist Afghan refugees.

38. **Mr. Qadir Baloch** (Pakistan) welcomed the initiative to hold a high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation, which he had requested upon taking office in 2013. He was sure that the commitment made by the international community during the discussions would enable Pakistan to continue to host Afghan refugees in the best possible conditions.

39. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it was impossible to end the conflict in Afghanistan without completing the stabilization and development process. The international community should, therefore, intensify its efforts to help Afghanistan emerge from instability and create the economic conditions and environment that were conducive to the return of refugees and displaced persons. Recalling that 5.8 million people had already returned to Afghanistan and that President Ghani and the Government had decided to make the voluntary repatriation of refugees and the return of displaced persons a national priority, he strongly encouraged the international community to seize the unique opportunity before it to boost its support to Afghanistan, especially through programmes based on international solidarity. The international community should provide financial and technical support to the programmes that had been implemented by the Afghan Government with a view to helping families returning to Afghanistan to reintegrate Afghan society successfully. It should also enhance its resettlement programmes for Afghan refugees and increase support for host communities.

40. **The Chairperson** thanked the participants for their contributions to the discussion.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.