

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

Distr.: General
12 June 2023
English only

Standing Committee

Eighty-sixth meeting
7-9 March 2023

Held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva
Summary record,* Wednesday, 8 March 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Cristian Espinosa Cañizares(Ecuador)

Contents

Regional activities and global programmes (continued)

- a. Regional updates (continued)
- iv. Americas (continued)
- v. West and Central Africa
- vi. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

* Summary records, prepared by external service providers, summarize the discussions and record decisions taken. Though extensive, they do not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings. Corrections to a summary record should concern only errors made regarding, for example, an official title, and a statistic or a statement reflected from the discussion. A correction does not allow for any additions or for changes to be made of a political character. Any proposed substantive corrections will be checked against the sound recording of the meeting before any change can be made. Requests for corrections should be sent to the ExCom Secretariat: excom@unhcr.org, and any corrected records will be reissued with a new date. Feedback on the summary records may also be sent to the ExCom Secretariat for consideration in the preparation of future summaries.

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

Regional activities and global programmes (*continued*)

a. Regional updates (*continued*)

iv. Americas (*continued*)

1. The representative of **El Salvador** (observer) said that the annual comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (known by its Spanish acronym MIRPS) report for 2022 reflected the advances made by his country in information-gathering, including through the modernization of the national statistics system to better track internal forced displacement. Revisions and updates to normative instruments and national policies had resulted in legislation that ensured protection and access to durable solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, returnees needing protection and stateless persons, given the ever more complex human movements in his region. The updated national MIRPS plan was predicated on institutional strengthening and awareness-raising for civil servants, thus ensuring the quality of services provided. Victim care management was based on personalized support, the provision of information on rights and assistance free of charge, safely and confidentially, in four areas of the country, including decentralized care in national and local facilities.

2. In education, the Government of El Salvador was revising instruments on care for the student population that was displaced or at risk of displacement as well as their families. It sought to promote educational continuity through various teaching methods, including coverage of displaced children in shelters, ensuring that no one was left behind. He thanked all countries and organizations involved in MIRPS for giving access to resources to care for child returnees needing protection and their families, for whom durable solutions were being pursued. In the labour market, there was a programme that gave at-risk young people opportunities to find their first job, allowing them to develop skills as a gateway to the world of work, an approach that was also fundamental to his Government's strategy for preventing violence with particular reference to young people. As it was International Women's Day, he noted that his Government was reviewing ways to ameliorate vocational training and income-generating skills for displaced women.

3. Regarding durable solutions, efforts were being made to create a nationwide system for certifying skills in order to ensure that refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees needing protection were able to gain access to the labour market. As part of El Salvador's commitment to human mobility, in June 2022, his Government had endorsed the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection to guarantee safe, orderly and regular migration through cooperation among countries, partners and international organizations. Finally, he thanked UNHCR, other United Nations agencies, participating international organizations and aid workers for their valuable contributions to regional and national projects, as well as civil society and other relevant actors for their substantial contributions. The Government of El Salvador would continue its efforts and good practices to aid displaced persons.

4. The representative of **HIAS** (NGO group statement) said that in Latin America and the Caribbean, mixed movements had grown to record levels in 2022, both in size and complexity. The protection space had shrunk following new restrictive migration policies, limiting access to safe routes throughout the region and putting forcibly displaced persons at greater risk. The negative impacts of the current economic downturn involved gender-based violence, education, food security, living standards, health, water and sanitation. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments continued to lack capacity to intervene, particularly in border and inaccessible areas. The Office's leadership was urgently needed to maintain a well-funded and coordinated response.

5. The displacement crisis at the Darién Gap now involved a growing number of Ecuadorians and Colombians in addition to Venezuelans. Barriers and policy changes, as well as the worsening quality of living, disasters and increased violence, had made it more difficult to regularize and integrate Venezuelans in some countries. Recently, owing to the continued restrictive policies of the United States of America, displaced populations were being obliged to return to their homes. Displacement was now characterized by flows to and from the North, the South and internally. The multifaceted effects included discrimination, physical and sexual violence, food insecurity and lack of basic services. In Colombia, violence had had immense humanitarian repercussions throughout 2022, particularly in cities where the displaced population was seeking to flee conflict. More than 7.7 million people remained in urgent need of humanitarian aid; displaced populations were at particular protection risk.

6. Since October 2022, Haiti had once again suffered a complex, multidimensional crisis. Political violence, instability and human rights violations, including attacks on NGOs, were commonplace. All of that was combined with a fuel shortage, cholera outbreak and famine. Haitians were fleeing by sea, but they increasingly encountered detention and returns in spite of the Office's appeal against those practices. In the Dominican Republic, the expulsion of people of Haitian descent had caused high levels of familial separation, protection risks and rights violations. The expulsions affected resilience and self-sufficiency, school attendance and medical treatment. A solution was also needed for access to documentation for Haitians abroad, as well as progress in implementing the Dominican naturalization law of 2014. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the economic and political situation remained critical. Natural disasters, a wave of violence and environmental security issues in the Orinoco Mining Arc further explained the continued exodus. Venezuelans were vulnerable to discrimination, food insecurity and risks such as human trafficking and sexual abuse.

7. Nicaraguans continued to flee to other countries in Central America and beyond; in 2022, record numbers of requests for asylum had been made in Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States. UNHCR and donors must increase their efforts to raise awareness of the problem, including the risk of statelessness due to the recent politically motivated denationalizations. Northern Central America was currently experiencing an increase in mixed migration flows in the middle of a multifaceted, pre-existing humanitarian crisis, aggravated by the cumulative effects of climate change, which affected food security. The rates of displacement, including internal displacement in those countries, remained alarming, especially if strong measures were not taken to address needs. Various programmes enabled Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans to remain temporarily in the United States, but lacking connections and resources, they were unable to do so. Furthermore, a recently proposed policy would, if enacted, prevent requests for asylum from persons crossing the border irregularly or travelling through a third country without requesting protection there beforehand.

8. In that context, NGOs called for strategies to tackle displacement, taking into account all the fundamental causes and the fact that current flows comprised many nationalities. Strategies, programmes and funding should be suitably designed. It was necessary to develop alternative approaches and temporary solutions in response to the lack of access to documentation facing Haitians and Venezuelans within their countries and abroad. Migratory and temporary asylum policies that minimized the domino effect that policy change in individual countries could have on displaced persons seeking protection were needed. It was essential to promote a human rights-based approach to border management. Existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms should be harmonized and streamlined to reduce the duplication of efforts and avoid overburdening humanitarian actors. Greater efforts must be made to maintain awareness of the displacement crisis in the region and ensure timely and sufficient funding, in particular by integrating humanitarian funding mechanisms and development programmes for civil society and reducing siloing and bureaucratization. A clear action plan for implementing the Los Angeles and Buenos Aires Declarations must be developed. Policies, plans and mechanisms for funding, using a shared-responsibility approach to strengthen regional response to the climatic factors of forced displacement, must be designed. Sustained social cohesion initiatives must be promoted by recognizing the positive contributions of displaced persons in their host communities. Organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons and host communities should be mobilized to address persistent stigma, racism and discrimination. Greater efforts must be made to protect and support the work of lawyers, human rights defenders and service providers in border areas and within Mexico. The historical tradition of asylum in the Latin American and Caribbean region proved that its governments could produce innovative ideas, work together and reach difficult agreements.

9. The **Director of the Regional Bureau of the Americas** (UNHCR) said that the statement by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States was a clear indication that despite disagreements, dialogue and coordination always remained important. He thanked Member States not only for their commitment to strengthening protection mechanisms in the region and seeking solutions, but also for their solidarity in the context of various global crises. Responding to comments on the specific situation at the Darién Gap, he said that many nationalities were present there, with different causes for their displacement, although often with similar intentions and a strong feeling of insecurity. Most people felt they had lost everything and were trying to find a future without a firm idea of where they would go. To the question of what response and recommendations could be given in such situations, he said that there was, ultimately, no simple solution, though being present on the ground was to some extent to enact the Los Angeles Declaration. The immediate response had to be humanitarian, serious and coordinated; the worst outcome in such situations was to have five different groups responding and duplicating assistance. A cross-border and regional approach was also needed, and it was necessary to see what was happening beyond borders

and along migration routes. Of great importance in that context were the network of shelters operated by the Catholic Church and other civil society groups along the various routes in Latin America and the Caribbean and the resource centres actively supported by the United States. Another important element was ensuring a strong State and civil society presence since the routes were in areas with high levels of trafficking. The role of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies was basically to manage information and provide assistance and legal guidance.

10. Regarding the question on gender and gender-based violence, he drew attention to a joint HIAS-UNHCR report which contained many examples of livelihood generation and self-reliance, information on services and referrals to asylum or other regular pathways. However, a humanitarian solution was insufficient: hence the relevance of the Los Angeles Declaration and its shared-responsibility approach. For a real reduction of humanitarian risk in those situations and better individual care, there had to be a community response. It was essential to strengthen sanitation, health and other community services; otherwise, xenophobia, discrimination and exploitation might proliferate. Another solution was legislative. Most people on the move wanted to continue their route north. People needed regular pathways, but some needed local solutions or in neighbouring countries. Temporary protected status could be a valid solution, as was using the asylum system, and while he welcomed the United States' new parole system for four nationalities, it was, perhaps, not enough. There must be more regular pathways to allow people who wanted to reunite with their families, needed protection or simply wanted a better life and a future to migrate legitimately to their intended country, wherever in the Americas it might be.

11. A number of representatives as well as host countries of Venezuelan refugees and migrants had asked questions regarding the situation and care of refugees and immigrants within the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It was important to provide options to people both inside and outside of Venezuela, which was why the United Nations provided external support through the inter-agency coordination platform for refugees and migrants from Venezuela and internal support through the humanitarian response plan. The coordination platform's approach was highly innovative, responding to the Secretary-General's request for a response based on people's needs rather than their status, and giving rise to coordination between UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on a platform with over 200 partners. Nevertheless, people would seek various types of status, depending on their reasons for leaving and their protection needs. Many requested different mechanisms for staying; others turned to the asylum system. There were 200,000 recognized refugees, but there were more than 1 million asylum-seekers of Venezuelan origin.

12. Xenophobia and discrimination – issues raised by a number of representatives – were phenomena against which various campaigns had been organized. But campaigns were not enough: the only real solution was reducing people's invisibility. A person with no identity and no documentation did not exist and so would be exploited. In that regard, he commended countries undertaking registration and documentation campaigns. In addition, if Venezuelans and others forced to be on the move were included in programmes and services, they would enrich their communities, diffusing any tension that could lead to xenophobia and discrimination. UNHCR was a lead agency for the provision of the protection, accommodation and basic necessities, which had benefited over 800,000 people in 2022. It had been involved in assisting returnees during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and in supporting health frameworks. UNHCR was also currently promoting and, with IOM, jointly leading an international support programme for returnee host communities that included strengthening services and packages for vulnerable families.

13. Turning to international cooperation, he thanked the United States – one of the major donors for the region – as well as the European Union, Japan, Spain and the United Kingdom. The Government of Canada had played an enormous role in the region, championing many initiatives not only for Central America but also for Venezuela. While the upcoming conference to be held in Brussels was a solidarity conference rather than a pledging conference, there would likely be announcements on how international cooperation would support the region, complementing governments' efforts towards regularization and documentation. Financial institutions had, crucially, provided around 60 to 70 per cent of total funds pledged at previous conferences.

14. Finally, regarding the Global Refugee Forum, he thanked the Colombian Government for agreeing to try to bring together the countries of the region. It was a real opportunity to consolidate the innovative chapters of the Global Compact on Refugees and to meet current displacement challenges regarding climate change and the triple humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The work of solidarity should not finish with the Global Refugee Forum, however. It should be a gateway to the next stage of efforts to protect refugees affected by crises, not only in the region but throughout the entire world.

v. **West and Central Africa**

15. The **Director of the Regional Bureau of West and Central Africa** (UNHCR) paid tribute on International Women's Day to the displaced women and girls that UNHCR served and their remarkable resilience and tenacity in the face of often very difficult circumstances. Her Bureau's regional update had indicated growing concerns about the situation in the central Sahel, in particular the spread of the crisis into coastal countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Thousands more people had subsequently arrived in the northern areas of those coastal countries, bringing the total to more than 23,000. Together with refugees from Burkina Faso hosted in Mali and the Niger, more than 90,000 refugees from Burkina Faso were in six neighbouring countries – a number likely to rise, as many more people in the coastal countries were yet to be reached and registered. Attacks in the north of Togo had internally displaced some 50,000 people, according to government estimates. In view of that unfolding situation, her Bureau had declared an internal level-1 emergency to reinforce its response and better prepare in the likely event of more arrivals into the coastal countries. She commended governments for keeping their borders open to asylum-seekers from Burkina Faso, appealing for particular attention to the coastal countries and for added support. In particular, funding to the central Sahel should be increased and expanded to include the needs of new arrivals into the coastal countries.

16. In March 2022, the Bureau had declared an internal level-2 emergency due to the sudden influx of refugees from Cameroon across the Chari River into neighbouring Chad. Several thousand people had been displaced internally from the inter-ethnic conflict that had erupted between fishing communities and herders. At present, some 14,000 of the 45,000 refugees that had crossed into Chad had returned in self-organized return movements. She was pleased to report that with support from the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and in partnership with other United Nations organizations – notably IOM, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) – UNHCR was mounting a vital peacebuilding project. A simplified voluntary return agreement between the Government of Chad, the Government of Cameroon and UNHCR was expected to pave the way for assisted returns in the coming weeks. Her Bureau was counting on all support available to realize that particular solution.

17. By the end of 2022, only 34 per cent of school-age refugees in her region had been in education. While those numbers remained low, it was particularly encouraging that 49 per cent of those enrolled were girls. The overall numbers of girls enrolled in school should be maintained and increased, and more girls should finish school. She congratulated the German Government on the thirtieth anniversary, in 2022, of the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative scholarship programme, and on the hope that the programme had provided to thousands of refugees in the region. She called on more actors to engage to institute more pathways to solutions and offer alternatives to the perilous journeys that far too many young people undertook in their desperate search for opportunities. UNHCR had agreed on a framework of engagement with IOM to jointly address mixed movements along the Chad-Niger route. On International Women's Day, she reaffirmed her Bureau's commitment to the inclusion, meaningful participation and leadership of women and adolescent girls in various activities. The Bureau was enhancing its direct engagement with women-led organizations. In preparation for the Global Refugee Forum, it was working with governments to further progress on the implementation of pledges and commitments and to identify new opportunities. Lastly, she acknowledged the extremely challenging times, monumental humanitarian needs and competing priorities and the need to sustain attention on multiple fronts. UNHCR had proven before that it was up to the task, and with the international community's support, it could deliver.

18. The representative of the **Republic of the Congo** (African group statement) said that Africa was the continent with the largest number of registered refugees and displaced persons. Intercommunity conflicts, climate change and natural disasters remained causes for population displacement. Yet against the background of a deteriorating global humanitarian situation, and despite development challenges and budgetary constraints, African countries were hosting an increasing number of forcibly displaced people and working to promote their economic and social inclusion. The group appreciated governmental cooperation with UNHCR, which led to considerable progress in creating a suitable protection environment.

19. Although African countries' efforts to improve access to asylum procedures were meeting with some success, challenges remained in areas such as child protection and the prevention of gender-based violence, exploitation and sexual abuse. In tackling those scourges, the African group welcomed the involvement of UNHCR in strengthening procedures for handling cases of violence. It encouraged UNHCR to accompany the important progress achieved in 2022 with research into durable solutions for issues faced by forcibly displaced persons.

20. The global crises identified by UNHCR in 2020 had grown worse in 2023. The African countries welcomed the creation of the emergency preparedness and response framework. Most countries in Africa did not have the human resources and facilities needed to respond in the event of forced population displacement, natural disasters, armed conflicts and other crises. Having more personnel trained in emergency preparedness and response would be an effective method of preventing and mitigating crises of all kinds.

21. He thanked UNHCR staff for their work in the field in carrying out its activities and programmes. The security of UNHCR staff in Africa varied from country to country, depending on the political and security situation. Currently, several African governments faced security challenges affecting the Office's work. All African States were aware of the need for their involvement in ensuring the safety of UNHCR staff, in particular by securing refugee camps and providing security and logistical assistance, by bolstering national laws and mechanisms to protect humanitarian workers and by holding inquiries into attacks on them. In the same spirit of seeking solutions to forced displacement-derived problems, the African group remained strongly in favour of promoting dialogue to address the root causes of displacements.

22. The representative of **Nigeria** commended the efforts of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement. Refugees were global citizens. Member States had an international obligation to protect and provide assistance to them in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

23. Her delegation took note of the ongoing repatriation exercise involving the return of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon, as well as the biometric verification and registration of Nigerian refugees in the Niger. The Government of Nigeria remained committed to ensuring registration of refugees in its territory and to issuing national identification numbers and refugee passports to facilitate ease of movement and protection for those individuals within and outside Nigeria.

24. There were growing concerns related to mixed movements, given that refugees and migrants were victims of human trafficking and people smuggling. As such, she welcomed practical programmes that highlighted protection risks in transit and alternatives to dangerous journeys. The partnership between UNHCR and IOM in that regard was commendable. Her Government also recognized the efforts made to strengthen regional partnerships with the Economic Community of West African States, particularly on the regional action plan concerning the Global Compact on Refugees and the model law on the protection of stateless persons. She welcomed plans to develop a 2023 climate action plan in West Africa, which should align UNHCR programmes with regional priorities and focus on long-term sustainability.

25. The Government of Nigeria recognized the challenges faced by UNHCR in implementing its mandate and acknowledged the effort of its workforce in protecting and assisting persons of concern, notwithstanding the many difficulties encountered in field operations. It took note of the funding gap and called for sustained partnerships in unearmarked funding.

26. The representative of **Ghana** said that political instability in West and Central Africa continued to impact UNHCR operations in the region. Ghana had been particularly affected by the situation in Burkina Faso. The Government had registered a total of 2,159 asylum-seekers from Burkina Faso, with reports of more crossing the border. Most were being hosted within communities and in people's homes. The Ghana Refugee Board was closely monitoring the numbers and working with UNHCR to develop a contingency plan, and ensure the country was in a state of readiness to handle an influx. Security along Ghana's northern frontier with Burkina Faso had also been bolstered in order to prevent a spillover of violence.

27. Her Government would continue to support and respect the rights of all refugees and asylum-seekers in its jurisdiction and ensure that they lived meaningful and responsible lives. Efforts were being made to integrate refugees into the national system, for instance, by granting them the same access to health and free basic education as Ghanaians.

28. She appreciated the UNHCR climate-related activities in the region, such as the reclamation of degraded lands and tree planting. However, desertification, drought and flooding, along with the accompanying food insecurity, had increasingly impacted the migratory routes and calendars of nomadic pastoralists, forcing them to move further south in search of grazing lands and water for their animals. Cross-border nomadic movement, which was a major herding practice in West and Central Africa, often resulted in encroachment on private lands held by local farmers and the destruction of their crops, thereby causing tension and at times bloody conflicts. In addition, the nomadic pastoralists mostly settled on the outskirts of communities, where they were isolated with little or no access to social services, such as

education or health care, thus increasing their vulnerability to enticement by extremist groups. For all those reasons, UNHCR must intensify its climate-related activities and focus on addressing the humanitarian crisis in the region.

29. The representative of **Japan** expressed concern about the escalation of terrorism in the Sahel region and its potential spread southward to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. Attacks on civilians and destruction of public facilities had forced millions of people in the region to flee both within and between countries. He was also concerned about the humanitarian crisis in the north-eastern parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and the Niger, where over 3.4 million people needed to evacuate. It was vital to strengthen the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including by addressing the root causes of terrorism. The international community must continue to support the Lake Chad region, particularly in its efforts to combat Boko Haram.

30. In 2022, the Government of Japan had contributed approximately \$3.6 million to UNHCR with a view to supporting the countries of the Sahel and the Lake Chad area. A further \$4.5 million had been provided for a project that supported refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities from Central Africa.

31. The representative of **Germany** welcomed the Office's efforts to assist displaced persons and host communities in West and Central Africa and said his country remained committed to supporting those efforts. He agreed that the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in West and Central Africa had become even more difficult, both in the Lake Chad and Sahel region but also increasingly beyond. Safe, voluntary and dignified returns must remain a priority where possible. It was necessary to improve collaboration and coordination between development, humanitarian and stabilization actors to achieve durable solutions. Reinforcing coordination with local entities, including the Lake Chad Basin Commission, was particularly important. His Government commended the establishment of the Central African Republic situation support platform. There was a need to harmonize national action plans with the Yaoundé Declaration on solutions in the context of forced displacement related to the Central African crisis. He urged more partners to join and support the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative tertiary scholarship programme.

32. The representative of the **United States of America** recognized the enormous challenges facing UNHCR, humanitarian partners, as well as regional governments when dealing with displaced and conflict-affected populations at mass scale. Vulnerable people would remain in peril without the critical support of refugee-hosting countries.

33. She called on the international community to increase its support for West and Central Africa, including the Sahel and the Lake Chad area. The region was facing unprecedented crises in the form of political instability, prolonged conflict, climate change and food insecurity, all of which were compounded by waning donor support, thus limiting the ability of UNHCR to respond to rising needs. It was alarming to learn of the increasingly restrictive security environment, including impediments to the security of humanitarian workers, and of barriers to access, the delivery of life-saving aid and civilian protection. Her Government remained committed to ending the crises, supporting durable solutions and addressing climate change impacts. She welcomed the progress made on durable solutions by UNHCR, partners and governments across the region and the establishment of the Central African Republic situation support platform.

34. It was important to pursue more innovative solutions ahead of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, including public-private partnerships and greater relief and development coherence. Deeper collaboration with the World Bank in the context of the International Development Agency (IDA) Window for Host Communities and Refugees would be welcomed. Member States had made encouraging progress towards their Global Refugee Forum commitments on refugee inclusion. In particular, she applauded the efforts of the Chadian Government to include refugees in the national education system, the decision of Cameroon to offer health care to all refugees and the adoption of new asylum laws in Benin and Chad. Ongoing work in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and the Niger to reform asylum processes and legislation was also encouraging. It was important to maintain the momentum and continue working closely with UNHCR with a view to achieving the commitments already made before the next Global Refugee Forum in December 2023.

35. The work done by the Government of Côte d'Ivoire on eradicating statelessness was praiseworthy. The Governments of the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Nigeria also deserved recognition for their efforts in developing new national action plans on statelessness. The Government of

Benin was commended for adopting a new law on stateless persons and nationality. Other governments should follow their lead. It was especially important to pass legal reforms that eliminated discrimination clauses in nationality laws that unfairly affected stateless women. The United States Government was committed to continuing its humanitarian support to West and Central Africa and looked forward to advancing humanitarian diplomacy, assistance and solutions in the region and beyond.

36. The representative of **Togo** said that the challenges of the post COVID-19 period along with the impacts of humanitarian crises demonstrated the value of multilateralism and the need for States to build international cooperation on the basis of solidarity. Development programmes in West and Central Africa must take into account the specific challenges facing refugee-hosting countries and respond to those challenges in a targeted manner based on the socioeconomic realities of those countries.

37. The Government of Togo had joined the UNHCR #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024. The campaign would help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal 16.9 on providing legal identity for all. Among the measures taken by Togo to end statelessness was its accession, in 2019, to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. He reaffirmed Togo's readiness to combat statelessness and fulfil all related obligations. His Government supported the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States to create a regional model law on the protection of stateless persons. It reaffirmed its commitment to the humanitarian principles enshrined in international legal instruments and called on partners to provide adequate financial and logistics support to relevant bodies. UNHCR must come out with strong guidance and conclusions in order to mobilize stakeholders towards ensuring international protection for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons.

38. The representative of **Switzerland** said that the causes of displacement in West and Central Africa were manifold, complex and interconnected. As such, it was important for UNHCR to continue its coordination with other stakeholders in the United Nations system and to operate in line with the triple nexus modality when conducting analyses, identifying and implementing measures and carrying out evaluations. To ensure sustainability, UNHCR must work through national systems and with local partners.

39. West and Central Africa was a region particularly affected by the climate change that was becoming a major cause of displacement. UNHCR should work with specialized institutions capable of mapping the impacts of climate change on natural resources within a specific territory and time period in order to better understand the nature of displacement and ensure that it was better managed. It should collaborate with national authorities to inform populations about living conditions, potential adaptation measures that must be put in place and relocation options.

40. The representative of **Norway** said it was worrying that the number of people of concern to UNHCR in the region had reached 13 million. The increase in access constraints was also a matter of concern. UNHCR should take steps to ensure better access. More information was needed on how the new policy restrictions on cash-based interventions had affected the work of humanitarian actors in the region. She drew attention to the solution for the situation of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire, which was a positive development in an otherwise bleak situation.

41. The Lake Chad Basin High-Level Conference held in January 2023 and co-hosted by Norway had brought humanitarian, development and peace actors together. Their commitment to finding long-term solutions to the complex situations had been clear. One of the issues discussed at the conference was solutions to forced displacement. UNHCR should work closely with the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement. Pilot countries included the Central African Republic, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria.

42. UNHCR should elaborate on how it would prioritize life-saving interventions concerning sexual and gender-based violence in the region. With 400,000 refugee children not in school and around 14,000 schools recently closed across the region at the end of 2022, she asked what UNHCR was doing to bring children, in particular girls, back to school.

43. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that the humanitarian context in the Sahel had deteriorated over the past year, with people's needs becoming ever more complex. In 2022, Member States had focused their comments on the crisis of protection being both a driver and a consequence of the acute needs in the region. The concerns raised about the crisis becoming entrenched and about the arrival of new security actors impacting civilian protection had sadly been realized. The situation was best illustrated by the return of "pockets of famine" in Burkina Faso, which were in areas no longer accessible to humanitarian actors, areas that were projected to increase and expand into other countries.

44. UNHCR must respond to the specific individual and community needs of those affected by violations of international humanitarian law and human rights. It must drive the centrality of protection through its leadership role within the humanitarian community and when engaging with other stakeholders. Lastly, it should use protection data and good analysis to better inform effective decision-making.

45. The representative of the **European Union** (observer) said that African countries continued to face significant forced displacement challenges due to protracted and escalating conflicts, violence and insecurity, exacerbated by the impact of climate change and the resulting food and nutrition insecurity. They had also been affected by the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine. Relations with African countries, the African Union and other regional organizations were a priority for the European Union, which had similar values and approaches such as compliance with international humanitarian law, finding durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in need of international protection and addressing mixed migratory movements more comprehensively.

46. The European Union shared current African concerns regarding deepening security, food and economic crises, including in West and Central Africa. Following the start of the Russian Federation's war in Ukraine, the European Union had not diverted support from other important crises. African people and countries could count on it to demonstrate solidarity through emergency response to humanitarian crises and foster resilience through comprehensive humanitarian, development and peace initiatives with United Nations partners like UNHCR. The European Union valued the role of UNHCR as lead of the protection cluster in West and Central Africa and encouraged the organization to fill vacant positions speedily. Efforts to improve coordination among partners and regarding protection analysis should be strengthened, for instance regarding durable solutions for refugees in Chad. The European Union appreciated UNHCR engagement in advancing the localization agenda, and looked forward to receiving more feedback regarding the impact and challenges of its implementation in the West and Central Africa region. He reiterated the European Union's zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and welcomed the Office's continued commitment to prevent and respond to it, in particular throughout its various operations in Africa.

47. The forced displacement crisis in central Sahel showed no sign of abating, and new security incidents continued. The European Union remained concerned by the situation and underlined the importance of contingency planning. In both Burkina Faso and Mali, limited access to displaced populations constituted a major challenge. All parties should ensure respect for international humanitarian law and uphold humanitarian principles. The European Union noted with concern the staggering number of 2.5 million internally displaced persons in the region, the majority in Burkina Faso. The same concern applied to Mali, where the European Union would like to see scaled-up interventions on shelter and habitat, and a more robust role for UNHCR in guiding and advising governmental responsibilities for the largest internal displacement sites. In the Niger, he commended UNHCR for supporting national authorities in registering forcibly displaced persons and recognizing those without refugee status. Promising progress had been made regarding durable solutions, too, for instance in Diffa. UNHCR should continue working towards the full inclusion of forcibly displaced persons into national systems and access to documentation for all, in line with the statelessness mandate.

48. In Mauritania, the European Union appreciated the Office's contributions to the political dialogue in favour of the progressive inclusion and integration of Malian refugees in national services and systems and in seeking better linked humanitarian and development solutions, including through targeting. The European Union continued to support refugee status determination processes as well as improving access to basic services and counted on UNHCR to strongly advocate for the respect of humanitarian principles in the Lake Chad area.

49. In Nigeria, he commended UNHCR for advocating for the rights of Nigerian refugees who had returned from neighbouring countries in 2022. Together with other United Nations agencies, UNHCR should act as firm lead of the protection cluster, at a moment when humanitarian partners faced growing challenges linked to camp closure and bureaucratic impediments. With regard to protection monitoring and documentation, he underlined the importance of objective data related to all protection incidents and reiterated the European Union's support for addressing internal displacement challenges in north-east Nigeria.

50. In the Central African Republic – a forgotten humanitarian crisis – the European Union recognized the efforts made by UNHCR, humanitarian partners and development actors to help internally displaced persons and refugees resume a normal life, despite a volatile security environment and

inflationary pressures. He reaffirmed the European Union's support for the Central African Republic solutions platform. More information would be welcome on how the new strategy for durable solutions – for both returning internally displaced persons and refugees – would be integrated into the national recovery and peacebuilding plan. Further details would also be appreciated on which coordination and funding mechanisms would be established. There was scope to improve the quality of coordination in the protection sector.

51. In Cameroon, the European Union looked forward to further joint advocacy to promote humanitarian principles and human rights, especially in the north-west, south-west and far north regions. In that context, he reiterated that humanitarian action should never be criminalized. Forcibly displaced people must not be harassed and medical personnel must not be a target. In the framework of the tripartite agreement between UNHCR, Cameroon and Nigeria for the voluntary repatriation of Nigerian refugees living in Cameroon, he underlined key role of UNHCR in the protection of Nigerian refugees and returnees.

52. The representative of the **Women's Refugee Commission** (NGO group statement) said that forced displacement remained a fundamental challenge across Africa. Populations facing conflict and climate-related shocks had few alternatives but to move, and the drought in the Horn of Africa, which again raised the prospect of famine and floods across West and Central Africa, were examples of such situations.

53. In many cases, new displacements came on top of previous ones. There was too much poverty in camps and informal settlements, which were often subjected to heavy security measures, limiting freedom of movement and making humanitarian action more difficult. There were far too frequent boat tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea and the English Channel, as desperate people risked their lives in increasingly dangerous ways.

54. Addressing those challenges required a clear assessment of past policy successes and failures. The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework had created real opportunities, most obviously through legislation in Ethiopia, Kenya and Cameroon, adding more rights and freedoms for refugees. The Government of Uganda had demonstrated the value of a more enabling environment for refugees' integration, allowing freer movements and exchanges with host communities.

55. Efforts to find durable solutions in Somalia focused on providing greater land tenure security for internally displaced persons, helping end the cycle of poverty and displacement. The Government of Liberia had enacted nationality law reforms to remove gender discriminatory provisions, meaning Liberian women and men now held the equal right to confer nationality on their children and spouses. It was a notable step towards ending statelessness in Africa. Leadership from regional bodies, particularly the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, also helped tackle the challenges of displacement. Regional bodies and States should build on the momentum and share concrete plans during a global summit on achieving gender equality in nationality laws, to be held in June 2023. She also welcomed the progress made by the Governments in the Niger, the Democratic Republic of the **Congo**, Nigeria and Ethiopia on ratifying and domesticating the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (also known as the Kampala Convention).

56. Fundamental challenges remained, however. Funding shortfalls for long-standing humanitarian operations raised concerns about the quality of services, not least the disturbing cuts to rations in times of drought and hunger. Ongoing protection challenges could not be underestimated, particularly in Ethiopia, where conflict dynamics contributed to the destruction of some refugee camps. In Kenya, concerns remained about the functioning of refugee registration processes and the potential for highly vulnerable people to fall through the gaps. In Nigeria, organized returns and relocations in areas still affected by armed groups exposed communities to harm and compounded access challenges. Nigerian refugees had been repatriated from the Niger without a tripartite agreement providing a protective framework. In Somalia, the nationality law denied Somali women the right to confer nationality on their children, further exacerbating vulnerabilities. In many countries, access to the most vulnerable continued to be a major concern. If aid agencies could not access vulnerable people freely, then the prospects for policy and programming being driven by communities themselves became ever weaker.

57. Real change required addressing resource constraints and donor fatigue. New resources must be found, unlocking the potential of markets and private sector investments. It was important to break down silos and better use new funding streams on climate adaptation, urbanization and resilience. Donors must

show creativity and intentionality to get the right resources to the right actors at the right time and focus on solutions as early as possible. Approaches like that which had allowed funds to be flexibly deployed towards the drought response in Somalia should be expanded.

58. Displacement-affected communities relied on networks of mutual support to access needed resources. Yet those informal networks were often invisible to aid actors, or worse, framed as illicit. Policy and programmatic shifts should unlock those networks and enable genuine self-reliance, while protecting those at risk of exploitation. The political challenges of increasing freedom of movement were well understood, particularly where security was a concern. Advocacy for freedom of movement must be central to all policy dialogue efforts, and challenging questions had to be asked of both donor and host governments.

59. There needed to be a greater understanding of the psychological impact on displaced people of recent reductions in resettlement programmes. While drastically expanding resettlement programmes might not be realistic, governments had a moral obligation to engage displacement-affected communities about future trends, which could also enable more realistic discussions about prospects for integration and return. For refugees and internally displaced persons, all organized movements that did take place must do so in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner based on meaningful consultations.

60. It was paramount to recognize that every displacement context was different, as were the aspirations of displacement-affected communities and individuals. While regional and global policy frameworks played a critical role, local actors would determine whether real progress was made. Communities needed to be seen as actors with agency and status. Local governments and municipal leaders should also receive support to provide integrated leadership.

61. Lastly, she welcomed the improved links between the United Nations development and humanitarian systems, but the important contribution that NGOs were already making should also be recognized. Being close to local communities, NGOs could help governments and the United Nations to develop better responses that truly left no one behind.

62. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa** (UNHCR) said she appreciated the pledges of continued support and engagement made by Member States. She welcomed the calls made by the African group for durable solutions as well as its dedication to implementing the commitments of the Global Refugee Forum. She thanked the African group for raising questions around the security of humanitarian workers. It was a good opportunity to pay tribute to the humanitarian workers who had tragically lost their lives over the past year.

63. She took note of the areas of continued interest, including the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, contingency planning, protection analysis, climate mitigation and improved coordination with other entities. The comments regarding the need for deeper collaboration with the World Bank in the context of the International Development Agency Window for Host Communities and Refugees had been taken on board. Equally, UNHCR had heard the appeal for increased humanitarian support to manage the flow of refugees from Burkina Faso and confirmed that it planned to set up an operational footprint in the northern part of the region.

64. A number of speakers had emphasized the importance of localization, including partnerships with local actors. Local non-governmental and civil society organizations had been key in the implementation of the protection monitoring system, particularly in the Sahel countries. In Burkina Faso, for example, more than a dozen local organizations had been grouped under the leadership of more established organizations with a view to ensuring the collection and harmonization of protection data. Local partnerships were not only enhancing the capacities of the local organizations themselves but also helping to strengthen links with communities, reduce operational costs and improve coverage in difficult-to-access areas. Indeed, it was thanks to such local collaborations that UNHCR had been able to navigate access difficulties. In addition to those opportunities, there were also challenges connected with localization. For instance, some of the refugee-led partner organizations did not have in-country registration and lacked the ability to seek funding. There was therefore scope to improve the participation of local organizations.

65. The Lake Chad Basin High-Level Conference had provided UNHCR with a very unique opportunity to follow-up on developments in the area. She took note of the recommendations made regarding the need for an integrated approach, closer collaboration within the United Nations, provision of common offers and efforts to coalesce around the triple nexus. UNHCR had joined discussions led by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNDP to review the outcomes and follow-up actions pledged at the Conference. Opportunities had arisen to hold discussions

with the Governments of Germany and Norway, which had requested country-based follow-up under the leadership of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators. UNHCR would collaborate and provide support as necessary, including in the context of the Secretary General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. It would also continue to pursue durable solutions for refugees in the Lake Chad Basin and collaborate with the Lake Chad Basin Commission in line with its regional stabilization strategy.

66. The revised national strategy for durable solutions for the Central African Republic was based on the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, which aimed to facilitate reconciliation, social cohesion and the durable return of displaced persons. The revised strategy had benefited from stronger participation of various actors. It had now been endorsed by the United Nations country team and would next be reviewed by the humanitarian country team and the Government. Regarding the Central African Republic situation support platform, she agreed with the call for better alignment of national action plans with the Yaoundé Declaration.

67. Member States had endorsed the development of a climate action plan. However, she wished to underline that while climate change was a direct displacement driver in West and Central Africa, it also contributed to fuelling community tensions. The climate action plan would help UNHCR to further green its responses and would be in line with national action plans.

68. Access in some countries remained very constrained. UNHCR was working around those constraints with the help of local organizations, but also through the use of digital tools. Cash was being distributed wherever possible, but problems remained, as in the case of Burkina Faso, where authorities had banned the use of cash.

69. On the prevention of gender-based violence, UNHCR would continue to raise awareness and work with partners to address the issues that made women vulnerable, including the lack of livelihoods. Efforts were also being made to adapt camp designs. UNHCR was working to address the root causes of school dropouts among girls, such as early marriage, and was making use of tools from the COVID-19 pandemic, including distance learning and radio programmes. Strong mentorship programmes were also being promoted to help girls to not only enrol in school but also to stay in school.

vi. East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

70. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes Region** (UNHCR) said that there were reasons for both hope and concern for the region. Over the past year, during a difficult time with many challenges – including food insecurity compounded by rising prices and climate vulnerability – countries in the region that already hosted some of the world's largest refugee populations had kept their borders open to new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and South Sudan, demonstrating their willingness to respect their international obligations. Progress had been made on the issue of statelessness by regional bodies such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and Kenya had taken steps to grant citizenship to a group that had long been without nationality, the Pemba.

71. Finding solutions to enable refugees to live in dignity and peace was a core part of the Bureau's work, and there had been some positive developments in the region. Djibouti was making strides towards local solutions by including vulnerable refugees in national social protection systems. Burundians were returning from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, and governments and development partners had made important commitments to invest in sustainable returns. Progress had also been made on the Solutions Initiative for South Sudan and the Sudan, led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In South Sudan, the Pockets of Hope approach had provided support to some of the more than 125,000 refugees who had returned in 2022. Kenya was moving forward with its "Marshall Plan", but more funding was needed for an integrated approach in Dadaab and Kakuma-Kalobeyei. Access to resettlement had been increased, with the cases of more than 30,000 individuals submitted to third countries in 2022. With additional funding and quotas, more could be done. Countries in the region were working to implement their pledges ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. She invited all Member States to make new and matching pledges to support them. She applauded IGAD, which played an important convening role through its support platform, and was proud that Uganda, long recognized for its progressive refugee policies, would be a co-convenor of the Forum.

72. Important political developments had also been made in the region. Parties to the conflict in northern Ethiopia had taken encouraging steps to implement a peace agreement, humanitarian access to the area was improving and internally displaced persons had been assisted to return home. However, the

needs remained great. Since mid-February, drought-affected communities in Ethiopia's Somali region had been sharing their already meagre resources with 98,000 new arrivals, mostly women, children and the elderly, fleeing conflict in Somalia.

73. The relationship between climate, conflict and displacement was complicated but the evidence was clear: climate change contributed to conflict, and conflict could exacerbate the impacts of climate change. There needed to be more investment in political solutions and in the preparation and adaptation of countries like Somalia in order to avoid another protracted displacement situation in the region. In 2022, a concerted international effort had managed to stave off a looming famine in Somalia. However, more than 280,000 new internally displaced persons had been recorded in the first month of 2023 alone. The Regional Bureau continued to work closely with United Nations Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams to ensure complementarity, in line with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.

74. The Horn of Africa was about to enter its sixth consecutive failed rainy season. More resources would be needed to provide life-saving aid and mitigate the impact of the drought on displaced people and their host communities. In South Sudan and the Sudan, there had been increased flooding, leading to multiple displacements. National and local authorities and aid agencies were doing their best, but humanitarian needs kept growing. Refugees were also continuing to face reduced food rations due to the ripple effects of the Ukraine crisis. Food insecurity had a major impact on protection and could not be ignored. Women were most affected, with gender-based violations on the rise. Expanded investment in livelihoods and financial inclusion could protect and uplift whole communities.

75. The East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region was a complex one, but one in which she was honoured to serve. She was proud of the work that the Bureau was doing and believed it could do more and do better. However, it lacked sufficient funding and was being asked to do more with less and faced with impossible choices. All members of the Standing Committee had made a commitment to responsibility-sharing, and the response to the Ukraine crisis had demonstrated what was possible. She therefore urged the international community to unite in a similar fashion to support those in need across Africa.

76. There was no single solution to forced displacement, and no country could tackle it alone. If the common goal was to push beyond sustenance towards durable solutions, more political and diplomatic initiatives would be required, with the combined efforts of all those working across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. She thanked host countries and donors for their support and NGOs and United Nations sister agencies for their partnership. She also reaffirmed her commitment to strengthening engagement with local and refugee-led organizations and remaining accountable to affected populations.

77. Lastly, in commemoration of International Women's Day, she drew attention to the refugee women whose determination and courage continued to inspire her work. Those included Shams, a Somali refugee who had walked for eight days in search of protection for her children, and Foni, a refugee from South Sudan who had benefited from an Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative scholarship and was now a research associate at the University of Oxford's Refugee-Led Research Hub. By working with those women and others like them, she hoped that sustainable solutions would be found to allow all refugees to pursue their dreams, ambitions and goals, and to realize their full potential.

78. The representative of the **Holy See** lamented the worldwide increase in the number of refugees caused by conflict, violence, persecution, food insecurity, poverty and climate change. Millions of people were being forced to leave their homes, often risking their lives in search of safety, peace and a life of dignity. He commended those countries in the region that, in spite of their own difficulties, continued to fulfil their legal obligations to those seeking protection. The high number and marginalization of internally displaced people was also a concern: internally displaced persons had the same rights as other citizens, so all governments, with the support of the international community, should work to seek immediate solutions, including through voluntary resettlement schemes and the provision of essential services.

79. Displacement should be a temporary, emergency situation, not a long-term, collective experience. Temporary solutions should make way for durable solutions, including the speedier resettlement of refugees in third countries. In that regard, the response of neighbouring countries was only as strong as that of the international community as a whole, including through the provision of financial and technical support. The number of children displaced due to violence, flooding and food insecurity was a particular concern, and it was tragic that so many were unable to receive a proper education or even to remember what it meant to have a home. In that regard, he echoed the appeal made by Pope Francis during his visit

to South Sudan in February 2023: to end all conflict and resume the peace process in a serious way so that people could return to living in dignity.

80. The representative of **Uganda** thanked the Director for eloquently outlining the issues on the ground in the region and acknowledging that Uganda hosted 70 per cent of the region's refugees. The report promised that UNHCR would provide humanitarian support for the ongoing influxes of refugees, especially from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but with a consistently declining budget allocated to its refugee response programme it was hard to see how that would be possible. It was tiring having to remind the international community of its responsibility to the region and to the human beings fleeing from persecution. It seemed that emergencies in Uganda and in the wider region had become normalized and sat at the bottom of the list of priorities.

81. On International Women's Day, it was good to see that there were many women on the podium and that the regional team was all women. However, thousands of miles away in Uganda, the Government was not able to address even basic concerns such as menstrual hygiene in refugee camps. If the international community and donors tired of providing support, how could they claim to be committed to burden- and responsibility-sharing? Development support would come, but it would not be free money. The Government was being asked to borrow money on top of hosting, and to pay it back with taxpayers' money. That just was not feasible. As a host country and one of the co-conveners of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, Uganda was pleased to have launched a road map focusing on five key areas, including self-resilience for refugees, climate change and durable solutions, and hoped that all Member States could join in that journey.

82. The representative of the **Netherlands** said that in view of the increase in cross-border movements and displacement of refugees and returnees, including recent displacements brought on by drought, it was important for the Regional Bureau and country operations to enhance their cross-border coordination and strategic engagement with donors, country authorities and other partners. She requested further information on the planned role of UNHCR in long-term development programming and the durable solutions agenda, particularly in Kenya and Somalia. Noting the large funding gap, the Netherlands recommitted to funding both UNHCR and other United Nations organizations and development actors in order to support refugee responses in the Horn of Africa, either through unearmarked humanitarian funding or through the national governments' refugee inclusion and national development plans. She requested more information about the UNHCR private sector fundraising strategy with a view to widening the funding base for the region.

83. The representative of **Ethiopia** said that Ethiopia had a long-established tradition of welcoming those seeking international protection, and despite serious humanitarian challenges related to the recent droughts, it had maintained its open-door policy to those fleeing conflict or serious disturbances in their countries of origin. It was currently hosting 900,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. The recent conflict in Somalia had displaced almost 100,000 more refugees to his country. The Government had already started registering them on a prima facie basis, and host communities were sharing what little they had, but the situation was placing additional responsibility and burdens on the country's already scant budgetary resources.

84. Despite limited international support, Ethiopia was making significant progress towards the pledges made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. It had harmonized its national education system, and more than 180,000 refugees had been enrolled in schools. More than 6,200 refugees were enrolled at public universities, with 75 per cent subsidies on tuition fees. The Government was also collaborating with UNHCR and others to provide primary, secondary and tertiary health services in public and private institutions. Ethiopia was cognizant of the need to provide self-reliance mechanisms for refugees in protracted situations and to invest in the long-term resilience of host communities. In that regard, the Government was providing increased job opportunities for refugees and, in collaboration with the World Bank, implementing development projects relating to economic inclusion, health and education services, livelihood and environmental protection. It was also engaging with partners to develop initiatives to create long-term resilience for refugees and host communities in protracted situations. Supporting host countries was an investment in a global public good, not just a charitable gesture.

85. As one of the major refugee-hosting countries, Ethiopia was looking forward to the upcoming Global Refugee Forum and assessing best practices, gaps and challenges in achieving pledges, while also working on new pledges to achieve the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. However, it was important to note that host countries had already made big pledges, and hosting itself was the biggest contribution. The upcoming Forum should be used to solicit new commitments from all stakeholders to move towards a fairer and more sustainable way of sharing responsibility for the pressing humanitarian

situations all around the world. It would be an opportune moment for all Member States to capitalize on the success of the Global Compact and make action-oriented pledge commitments.

86. Ethiopia had millions of internally displaced people, as a result of conflict and prolonged drought. Policy frameworks were being put in place to address internal displacement-related issues and to implement various projects to bring durable solutions to affected areas. The country was working to implement the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and was looking forward to working closely on durable solutions with the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement. The Government of Ethiopia appreciated the support extended to it by UNHCR and its partners, but requested further support for its efforts to address the challenges facing the internally displaced.

87. The representative of **Japan**, noting that stability in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region was essential for achieving peace and stability in Africa as a whole, said that despite the welcome peace agreement in northern Ethiopia, there continued to be internally displaced persons in Somalia, the Sudan and South Sudan and an outflow of refugees to neighbouring countries. In addition, food shortages in a wide area spanning Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya had forced many to flee. In the Great Lakes region, he was deeply concerned at the rising tensions between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Violence by armed groups was resulting in a large number of civilian casualties, diminished human rights and a deteriorating humanitarian situation, including continuing attacks on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

88. The focus should be on regional solutions, including the Rwanda and Nairobi processes, in which the involvement of all parties – including the rebels – should be encouraged. All armed groups should be persuaded to cease hostilities and unconditionally withdraw from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Japan, in collaboration with international organizations, would provide support to strengthen social resilience in conflict areas and for actions to promote disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. It was important that the international community should continue to work together and provide assistance to improve the human rights and humanitarian situation in the region.

89. The representative of **Kenya** expressed thanks for the information on the changing climatic conditions in the Horn of Africa, and how that intersected with and compounded other drivers of displacement, exacerbating humanitarian needs. Kenya was a frontline state, and was currently experiencing one of the worst droughts in the whole of the Africa region, as the country entered the sixth consecutive failed rainy season. Kenya had also hosted over 562,000 million refugees and asylum-seekers for close to three decades.

90. As noted in the update report, the combination of conflict and climate shocks had triggered new displacements, including across international borders, with some people seeking refuge in Kenya. Regrettably, the drought was heightening protection and humanitarian needs and was undermining livelihoods in already dire situations. She requested further information on the drought response plan for the region, with a focus on persons of concern, as well as host communities, including on financing and partnerships with other humanitarian and development actors.

91. She commended the Office's commitment to supporting the implementation of the Action Plan of the IGAD Regional Climate Change Strategy and would appreciate further details on how that collaboration was being put into effect. She looked forward to an update on the outcomes of the joint country assessment missions undertaken by the East African Community, IGAD and UNHCR to countries within the region, including Kenya, as part of the African Development Bank's regional programme on climate investment for the economic employment of refugee and returnee women, as well as women in host communities. Similarly, she would welcome information on envisioned plans towards a climate investment programme.

92. It was a matter of concern that the region's operational needs had been funded to the extent of only 8 per cent, with just \$162.7 million in recorded voluntary contributions. In that regard, she would appreciate further clarification from UNHCR on its response mobilization efforts to address the situation, given the region's currently dire situation. She also noted with concern that 5 of the 12 countries highlighted in the UNHCR underfunded report of September 2022 belonged to the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region and stressed that continued underfunding risked lives. The region continued to face some of the worst drivers of forced displacement, including violent conflict, climate shocks and drought. Underfunding risked forcing UNHCR to reduce its assistance, including life-saving support.

93. UNHCR should amplify the call for innovative financing for those countries most affected by climate change, in order to build adaptability and resilience to climate change shocks. Multi-year and unearmarked funding was crucial for better operational planning, to give UNHCR greater flexibility and agility in addressing emerging needs. With the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide having risen to over 103 million, the need for humanitarian support had never been greater.

94. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed concern at the proposed creation of new refugee camps in Ethiopia and asked what engagement UNHCR had had with the Government on alternative approaches to encampment. Against the backdrop of the likely sixth failed rainy season in the region, UNHCR appeals had focused on basic relief items and cash responses to meet immediate needs. However, given the scale and duration of the crisis, she wondered what might be done beyond “business-as-usual” humanitarian efforts – for example, engaging development partners, international financial institutions, private sector partners and national governments. In view of the significant challenge posed by internal displacement in Ethiopia, she would appreciate an update from UNHCR on what global support was being offered to Ethiopia to ensure both a coherent response and a coordinated position on internal displacement, based on good practices.

95. Noting that in the Sudan the number of refugees arriving from Ethiopia had stabilized since 2020, and that UNHCR was planning for possible voluntary returns as progress was made on the implementation of the peace agreement in northern Ethiopia, she asked for information on the conditions that needed to be in place for the voluntary returns and on the timeline. She wished to know whether UNHCR was seeing any flowback of returnees to Ethiopia. She had been disappointed to see that throughout 2022, food and cash transfer values for refugees had been unstable; with constrained finances, a more needs-orientated approach was required in the Sudan. She asked how partners could support UNHCR in strengthening its collaboration with the World Food Programme to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees were targeted, instead of the existing approach where every refugee, including new refugees, received the same food support.

96. She wished to know how UNHCR would resource its new role of lead area-based coordination agency in Somalia and what it was doing to engage communities, governments and humanitarian, development and peace actors to drive medium-term change, reduce dependency on humanitarian support, enhance prioritization and address the many drivers of need. She encouraged UNHCR to work with the broader international community, in consultation with host countries, to strengthen the efforts to enfranchise South Sudanese refugees within the region, and within the eligible diaspora populations, to facilitate their participation in national elections in 2024.

97. The representative of the **Sudan** commended UNHCR for working tirelessly to mitigate the suffering of the 16.6 million persons of concern in the region – a figure that was likely to increase given the region’s many difficulties and challenges – and said that urgent action was required to meet their needs. For many decades, the Sudan had implemented an open-door policy towards refugees. While the official number of refugees was currently 1.3 million, the actual number was much higher. Some 70 per cent of refugees in the Sudan did not live in camps, thereby placing a strain on local communities and already overstretched public services.

98. In that connection, he recalled the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing between host countries and the international community, as enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees, and said that firm commitments from all stakeholders were vital in order to provide timely and sufficient funds for UNHCR operations to protect refugees in host countries. The existing funding gap was a matter of concern, and he wished to know what UNHCR believed the international community could do to respond to the ongoing challenges in the region, especially those related to the forced displacement associated with drought and climate change.

99. The representative of **Finland** commended UNHCR and its dedicated staff for the hard work carried out in challenging circumstances and expressed his support for their efforts in East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. While there had been significant and much-needed progress in terms of humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia, challenges remained. He wished to know more about the Office’s plans in northern Ethiopia, including in relation to the voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable returns of internally displaced persons. Information about the plans and capacity to support the recent arrivals of Somali refugees in the Somali region of Ethiopia would also be appreciated.

100. He expressed concern about the conflicts in western Ethiopia, including challenges to humanitarian access; it was vital to ensure that humanitarian actors had safe, unhindered access to all parts

of the country. Another matter of great concern was the very difficult humanitarian situation in South Sudan, in which conflict intersected with the impacts of climate change and food insecurity, and where protection needs were significant, including those related to sexual and gender-based violence.

101. He underscored the centrality of protection in the region as a whole. While underfunding continued to be a challenge, it was important to focus on those most in need and those in the most vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, who were too often left behind in humanitarian action. Noting that the regional update did not refer to persons with disabilities, he asked for further information on the Office's plans to mainstream disability inclusion in its operations.

102. Given that UNHCR led the protection cluster, he encouraged it to ensure that disability inclusion was taken into account in the cluster's work at country level, and that use was made of in-country expertise, for example from organizations of persons with disabilities, in order to ensure that aid was needs-based and delivered impartially. Expressing concern at the growing number of persons forcibly displaced annually, he stressed the importance of seeking durable solutions for refugees; in that regard, the Pockets of Hope initiative in South Sudan was a great example of facilitating returns.

103. The representative of **Norway**, noting that sexual and gender-based violence had sharply increased in the region, said that while the Office's efforts to offer protection and support to victims were to be commended, she wished to know more about what preventive actions were being taken. While she also acknowledged the efforts of UNHCR to implement the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, she expressed concern at the constraints in accessing asylum procedures in the region, which had led to unregistered populations being unable to meet their basic needs, onward movements and incidents of refoulement. She urged UNHCR to work with governments to solve those problems. She welcomed the initiative to hold an expert conference on the eradication of statelessness in order to reinvigorate the implementation of the 26 pledges made by 10 countries from the region as part of the #IBelong campaign.

104. The representative of the **United States of America** expressed grave concern that even as new violence had broken out in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, long-standing conflicts persisted. Humanitarian responses, strained by additional conflict and climate shocks, could not meet those rapidly growing needs alone, and efforts must be made to engage new partners, innovate and find solutions. Thanking UNHCR for its work to assist the millions of displaced people in the region and the generous host countries and communities that welcomed refugees, he called on donors to redouble their support for emergency as well as protracted responses throughout the region.

105. In the Great Lakes region, he commended the UNHCR response to the influx of over 100,000 new arrivals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Uganda and Rwanda in 2022 and early 2023, while still balancing the immense needs of protracted refugee populations. The United States remained committed to helping to increase resettlement numbers in the region and would continue to provide UNHCR with flexible funding to meet needs.

106. He congratulated the Government of Uganda and UNHCR for their effective Ebola response and praised Kenya's progress on reducing statelessness. Efforts to engage development actors in refugee-hosting areas were to be commended. He thanked the Government of Kenya and UNHCR for their collaboration in resettling refugees from Kenya in the United States.

107. In Somalia, he commended efforts to address new displacements, the life-threatening lack of food and water and ongoing threats of violence, and urged the Somali Government to expand its work to provide stability and access to public services, necessary for any significant return of the nearly 800,000 Somali refugees in the region. In Ethiopia, he applauded the Office's establishment of the Alemwach refugee site in the Amhara region to provide support to that doubly displaced group that had suffered so greatly. While the progress following the November 2022 peace agreement had been heartening, violence in Oromia and drought had displaced hundreds of thousands more people. He commended the Ethiopian Government and UNHCR for their response to the arrival of more than 95,000 Somali asylum-seekers over the past two months and called upon donors to provide resources to respond to those multiplying crises.

108. With regard to durable solutions, he underscored the importance of efforts by UNHCR and the Burundian Government to improve the sustainable reintegration of Burundian refugees and called on all actors to increase support for durable solutions, including voluntary returns. He welcomed the progress made towards the implementation of the Solutions Initiative for South Sudan and the Sudan and called on all parties to create conditions, in a conflict-sensitive manner, for the sustainable reintegration of displaced persons.

109. Expressing alarm at the increasing impact of climate shocks on humanitarian operations, including secondary displacement caused by drought and flooding, he urged donors and governments to prioritize funding for climate mitigation activities. In addition, the continuing attacks against aid workers and obstacles to impartial humanitarian access were a matter for grave concern. Stakeholders must strengthen the protection of civilians and the security of aid workers and their facilities and demonstrate respect for international humanitarian law. It was hoped that efforts would be redoubled to address the root causes of forced displacement in the region with urgency, resources and political will.

110. The representative of **Canada** said that drought, conflict and insecurity, worsened by a lack of gender equality and climate change, were drivers of ongoing crises around the world. It was important that the world keep sight of the unprecedented and urgent needs of refugees and other persons of concern in the region. Many underfunded crises, including in Ethiopia, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, required support.

111. Canada had heeded the call from the High Commissioner to advocate for a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance and ensure that support for one crisis did not come at the expense of others. It was also necessary to do more to support partners that were responding every year to a growing number of crises, with no solution in sight. Consistent dialogue and leadership were more important than ever in order to advance durable solutions and implement more comprehensive refugee responses through the Global Compact on Refugees.

112. Beyond humanitarian action, Canada would continue to find solutions by resettling both privately sponsored and government-assisted refugees from across the region; UNHCR, IOM and host governments were to be thanked for their ongoing cooperation in those efforts. The generosity of host countries in the region that had maintained open-door policies for refugees was sincerely acknowledged. Despite serious funding challenges, Uganda – the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa – demonstrated a commendable commitment to providing protection and assistance to refugees who had the right to work, move freely and access health care and education.

113. Ethiopia was also a long-standing and generous host of refugees from the region, even with well over 20 million Ethiopians in need of humanitarian assistance as the result of drought, conflict and insecurity. It was important to remember the plight of the nearly 900,000 refugees who had sought safety within Ethiopia's borders and, for the most part, remained reliant on international assistance to meet their basic needs. UNHCR and its partners were to be commended for their work and support of South Sudanese, Somali, Eritrean and other refugees in Ethiopia, often in extremely challenging circumstances.

114. Expressing deep concern about the humanitarian situation in the Sudan, where conflict was displacing a growing number of people for the third year in a row, he continued to advocate for unhindered access to populations in need, including in conflict hotspots such as Darfur. In South Sudan, he was concerned at the impact of chronic flooding and alarmed by the ongoing and large-scale protection challenges faced by civilians, especially women and girls. He welcomed the Office's efforts to strengthen the policies and systems relating to gender-based violence and child protection in the region, and commended efforts to enhance protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.

115. He reiterated Canada's commitment to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse in the delivery of international assistance across all contexts. He expressed support for the full implementation of the United Nations policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse and stressed the importance of a system-wide approach to combating those practices; in that regard, UNHCR should work closely with other United Nations entities to further strengthen existing prevention and reporting mechanisms in the region.

116. The representative of **Germany** said that while he welcomed the Pockets of Hope initiative, which had the potential to provide considerable added value in other humanitarian crises, such initiatives should not hamper the fulfilment of the UNHCR core protection mandate in South Sudan. In that regard, he expressed concern about grave and widespread protection risks, particularly for women and girls, and called upon UNHCR in its capacity as protection sector lead to strengthen all efforts to prevent and combat systematic abuse. He also urged UNHCR to closely monitor the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in South Sudan, which must always be informed, voluntary, safe, sustainable and dignified.

117. Expressing support for the strategic objectives of the Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he said that in light of the grave displacement situation, it was vital to strengthen all efforts to find and mobilize solutions for persons of concern. He called upon UNHCR to

further strengthen its engagement with OCHA, UNDP and IOM to provide protection and assistance to newly displaced and long-term refugees. The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was not and should not be forgotten, and UNHCR was encouraged to continue to use all channels of communication and coordination to address that complex humanitarian crisis.

118. He concurred with the assessment of the situation in the Horn of Africa. The persisting drought meant refugees and internally displaced persons faced an increasing risk of food insecurity. He welcomed the strong emphasis on protection as a cross-cutting issue and expressed the hope that the Nairobi Process would help reach people in need and pave the way for returns. It was vital to reinforce access in remote and previously inaccessible areas; in that regard, UNHCR had a key role to play, and he encouraged enhanced coordination with humanitarian, stabilization and development partners on the ground.

119. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** said that, beyond UNHCR assistance in the region, there should be greater focus on development actions to counter the impacts of climate change and other socioeconomic challenges, along with efforts in the areas of security and peacebuilding. As of March 2023, some 18 development projects directly targeting refugees and displaced persons had been implemented by his Government, including eight in the African region, for which \$55 million would be disbursed with the aim of securing long-term benefits. The design of the development projects had taken into account the significant needs of, and burden shouldered by, the major host countries, as well as a new nexus between development, environment and peace, thereby incorporating a more tailored approach.

120. Noting from the regional update that a large number of recipients of financial assistance had rated cash as their preferred modality, he said that it did not automatically guarantee the effectiveness of the programme in connection with long-term impact and self-reliance. He would be interested to hear the views of UNHCR in that regard, and how the cash programme could be developed to ensure more long-term outcomes.

121. The representative of **Australia** expressed support for the Office's important humanitarian work in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region and for other humanitarian actors, including local organizations, as they operated in challenging and often dangerous contexts. The significant humanitarian challenges across Africa, particularly the combination of displacement, conflict, food insecurity and the impacts of climate change, were a matter of deep concern. Host countries in the region – and indeed in all regions – were to be commended for their ongoing efforts to support refugees and, in particular, to include them in development plans and programmes.

122. She welcomed the work of UNHCR in responding to immediate life-saving needs in the region. Australia had committed to providing 40 million Australian dollars to combat food insecurity and rising displacement in Horn of Africa countries, Yemen and Pakistan and, as part of that package, was providing UNHCR with funding for the 2023 Horn of Africa drought appeal.

123. The representative of the **European Union** (observer) said that the forced displacement challenges in Ethiopia were enormous. The European Union and its member States welcomed the ceasefire agreement that had been signed in November 2022 and commended the progress that had already been made. They were fully engaged in supporting its implementation and achieving lasting peace, but there was also a need to focus on the European Union's three key requests: ceasefire and withdrawal of Eritrean forces; humanitarian access; and accountability for human rights violations. The European Union and its member States had continued to support the Ethiopian people, having put forward two packages of 166.5 million euros as individual measures for education, health and food security in July and September 2022. A third tranche of financing totalling 162.5 million euros was in progress, focusing on resilience, internal displacement and private sector recovery. The Office's aim to reinforce the provision of health, education and sanitation services to both refugees and host communities in Ethiopia was a positive step.

124. The situation of internally displaced persons in Ethiopia was crucial and challenging. The returns of the internally displaced must take place in a voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable manner. Although progress had been made, the objective of full, safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid throughout the country had not yet been reached. Assistance must be able to reach all people in need in all regions, unimpeded. Instability and forced displacement in parts of the country were a concern, and it would be interesting to hear the views of UNHCR on the overall country-level strategy for the coming months. It was also necessary to restart the registration of refugees to gather the necessary data to enable an informed, context-sensitive response.

125. The European Union had stepped up its support to the displaced populations in Somalia that had left their homes due to conflict, climate shocks and drought. Although the famine threshold had not been

surpassed in 2022, the situation remained dire. It would be useful to hear more about the UNHCR contingency plans and prioritization. Following the recent signature of a framework agreement, the European Union and its member States continued to advocate for a stable, peaceful and prosperous Sudan and had mobilized to address the humanitarian needs of those affected by protracted and new internal displacement. They commended the Sudan for hosting one of the highest numbers of refugees in Africa, but were concerned that the operating environment for UNHCR and its partners was becoming increasingly restrictive. UNHCR had an essential role to play in South Sudan, particularly with regard to protection against and combating sexual and gender-based violence. The European Union welcomed the development of a fully-fledged protection monitoring system, while acknowledging that grave and widespread protection risks persisted, particularly for women and girls. The allegations of sexual and gender-based violence at the Malakal camp were a serious concern and, although its staff had not been implicated, UNHCR should strengthen efforts to prevent and combat such systemic abuse, in its capacity as protection sector lead.

126. UNHCR was encouraged to further engage in coordination, diplomacy and advocacy, as well as support tripartite agreements and work with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and Governments to develop a regional strategy on durable solutions. UNHCR was urged to take the opportunity to improve outreach to key donors and expand its resource base by adopting the European Union's new strategic framework for the Great Lakes region.

127. With a view to achieving durable solutions for internal displacement, UNHCR should further engage with IOM, UNDP and OCHA to formulate a collective response. In that regard, the European Union appreciated the Office's outreach to development actors and reiterated its full support for the IGAD Support Platform. Taking note of the ambitions of the Pockets of Hope initiative, she reiterated that continued monitoring of returns was required and that efforts should not hamper the fulfilment of the core protection mandate of UNHCR. Returns must always be voluntary, safe, sustainable and dignified. Lastly, she thanked Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda for their solidarity in hosting millions of refugees from neighbouring countries, and welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to promote their inclusion in national protection systems.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.