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Summary record of the 649th meeting

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Chairperson: Mr. Badr(Egypt)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Larsen** (Norway), commending the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for ensuring that, despite the changes to the international protection regime, the issues of refugee protection and statelessness would still be addressed, said that operations in Libya, West Africa and the Horn of Africa had demonstrated the need for both timely humanitarian responses and robust and flexible emergency response mechanisms. UNHCR had been able to evaluate and reassess its approaches, and she urged the High Commissioner to ensure that the process continued.
2. Expressing concern at the situation in the Horn of Africa, she said that the scale of the famine was increasing day by day and hundreds of thousands of people could die in the coming months if the relief effort was not scaled up. She commended Kenya and Ethiopia for the hospitality that they had shown to so many refugees from Somalia and noted that simply establishing camps for displaced persons was not enough; increasing assistance and protection in the home villages of refugees was also vital. She encouraged UNHCR to investigate new methods to reach out to the underserved displaced populations of South Central Somalia.
3. Given the scale of current humanitarian emergencies, the increased operational complexities and a sharp increase in the numbers of actors and stakeholders, UNHCR must do its part to increase its leadership and coordination roles, particularly with regard to strengthening the inter-agency response system, in order to ensure tangible results and the optimal use of resources. Stakeholders would continue to monitor progress in that regard.
4. As sustained political engagement was a key tool for addressing protracted refugee situations, it was vital that UNHCR worked closely with host Governments, development actors and donors to support and stimulate political processes in States experiencing such situations. She commended the establishment of the Transitional Solutions Initiative and encouraged Governments to take advantage of the potential that it offered, as Norway had done in activities in eastern Sudan.
5. She expressed concern that the number of persons displaced as a result of natural hazards was increasing and that there was no appropriate protection framework for that group and recalled that Norway had organized the Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement earlier in 2011. The conference had produced a set of principles and suggested approaches for mitigation, preparedness and response. Norway was keen to work with interested States, UNHCR and other relevant stakeholders to address those issues.
6. **Mr. Houffaneh** (Djibouti), noting with interest the High Commissioner's comments on UNHCR reform, said that he welcomed the introduction of the results-based approach to performance evaluation and hoped to see further improvements being made. In addition, further discussion of the role of UNHCR in serving internally displaced persons was needed.
7. He expressed concern that, at a time when the mandate of the organization was continuing to expand, UNHCR was experiencing financial difficulties. It was to be hoped that the international community would be sensitive to the difficulties faced by host communities and the need for additional funding.
8. Expressing appreciation to the High Commissioner for leading efforts by UNHCR to assist refugees from Somalia, he explained that the worsening drought and famine in southern Somalia had led to a significant increase in the number of refugees arriving in Djibouti. The drought had been compounded by the long-standing conflict in Somalia, and a wide-ranging, multisectoral intervention was necessary to address the situation. Such

interventions should be accompanied by efforts by the international community to find a durable political solution to the crisis. In that connection, he welcomed the recent signing of an agreement by Somali leaders on a road map for transition.

9. **Ms. Aderhold** (Germany) said that, while the humanitarian system needed to be adapted to address issues such as climate change, new patterns of natural disasters, food and water insecurity, and armed conflicts, the two reference conventions for UNHCR still constituted a solid basis for protecting and providing assistance to refugees and stateless persons. She welcomed the active role of UNHCR in strengthening the humanitarian cluster system, the close cooperation between UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in North Africa and the collaboration with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on the issue of common needs assessments.

10. Preparedness was essential to responding to growing needs and changing operational requirements, and she welcomed steps taken to analyse and address future displacement patterns and gaps in the protection system. A prepared, system-wide approach to security management would help to ensure the safety of UNHCR staff in the field. She noted that globalization had significantly changed the funding landscape and welcomed the efforts by UNHCR to broaden its donor base.

11. **Mr. Ullah** (Pakistan), expressing appreciation to UNHCR for its collaboration on the protection and assistance of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, said that his country remained committed to upholding the principles in the two core conventions and to assisting Afghan refugees in Pakistan, despite the social and economic problems that the nation faced. Indeed, refugees in his country enjoyed access to the same rights and opportunities as all citizens, such as freedom of movement within the country and access to civic amenities.

12. Together with UNHCR, Pakistan had developed a refugee management framework to address the growing needs of the refugee population. To date, the Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy had been a success, allowing for the registration of 2 million Afghan refugees. A population profiling and response exercise had been carried out to analyse and improve the Government's response to refugees' needs. However, pull factors must be created inside Afghanistan through, for example, the provision of land, shelter and employment opportunities to returning refugees.

13. He drew attention to the vital role of the Refugee-Affected and Hosting Areas Programme in addressing and mitigating the security, socio-economic and environmental challenges faced by host communities. More funding was required to ensure that the Programme could fulfil its mandate. He furthermore appealed to States to provide more resettlement places to address the protracted refugee situation in his country.

14. Pakistan was planning to hold an international stakeholders' conference in the upcoming months, and he looked to UNHCR for support and guidance in that regard.

15. **Mr. Martinelli** (Switzerland), expressing appreciation for the efforts of UNHCR to address the needs of refugees in an increased number of crisis situations, paid tribute to the countries that hosted large numbers of refugees and urged States that had not done so to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. He welcomed the efforts by the African Union to develop a legal framework to protect the rights of displaced persons in the region through the Kampala Convention.

16. With regard to budgetary issues, he expressed concern about the lack of new donors and encouraged UNHCR to continue to seek alternative funding sources. He noted the efforts by UNHCR to address the issues raised by the United Nations Board of Auditors in its 2010 report to the General Assembly. UNHCR needed an efficient and solid structure that balanced cost-efficiency with quality, and Switzerland was ready to provide increased support for UNHCR operations on both technical and protection issues.

17. His country had long been involved in initiatives to ensure the security of humanitarian workers and was working with partners to develop a normative guide and practical manual on humanitarian access in conflict situations for use by national authorities and humanitarian actors. It also intended to develop the Nansen Refugee Award in cooperation with Norway.

18. **Mr. Kajwang** (Kenya), expressing appreciation to the High Commissioner for visiting Kenya and the Daadab refugee complex, said that, during 2011, Kenya had welcomed more than 125,000 Somali refugees. More than 1,300 refugees continued to arrive daily, placing increased pressure on already overstretched resources and requiring his Government to provide additional resources such as security and health personnel. There was a need to develop concrete economic assistance for host countries, and he welcomed the proposal by UNHCR to establish a steering committee to assist with research into the cost and impact of hosting refugees. Host communities often shouldered the largest burden and needed adequate resources to offset the negative social, economic and environmental impact of such situations.

19. With regard to Somalia, steps should be taken inter alia to strengthen the Transitional Federal Government and increase support for humanitarian activities and development projects in host communities. He welcomed UNHCR plans to establish a high-level panel on the Somali refugee situation, as it was vital to find a solution to that protracted refugee situation.

20. **Ms. Mirachian** (Italy) said that, with the emergence of new crises and the resulting large-scale movement of populations, Italy had adopted more targeted measures in its asylum and reception systems. It had mobilized all possible resources and was relying on the development of more effective European regulations, together with a common European asylum system.

21. She expressed sincere appreciation for the assistance that her country had received from UNHCR to process and provide support to the large number of migrants that had been arriving since the start of the uprisings in countries such as Libya and Tunisia. The Italian island of Lampedusa had received more than 50,000 people since the start of 2011, and a comprehensive plan had been developed to allow the migrants to be hosted in regions and municipalities across Italy.

22. Recognizing that forced migration could be the result of either a situation inside a country or extreme weather events, she stressed that international cooperation and partnership should be at the centre of all humanitarian responses and were vital to building national capacities and addressing protection gaps. Statelessness was an important issue, and there should be wider acknowledgement of existing normative gaps and efforts to develop new and stronger norms on nationality.

23. Lastly, since 2000, there had been a growing gap between available funding, planned budgets and actual expenditure. She urged UNHCR to continue to use the Global Needs Assessment tool and a results-based framework to ensure that funds were used where they were needed most and to take steps to broaden its donor base.

24. **Ms. Southern** (Australia) said that the forthcoming commemorations of the 1951 and 1961 conventions would be an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm and strengthen protection principles in response to complex and pressing global challenges. Broad cooperation to that end was vital. The renewed focus within the Executive Committee on protection-related themes, in particular statelessness, was therefore welcome. States should accede to, and bring relevant national legislation into line with, all relevant international instruments, and commit to practical ways of improving the lives of displaced people.

25. With its confirmed expertise in dealing with conflict-related internal displacement, UNHCR was well placed to lead the natural disaster protection cluster for the proposed pilot period: the protection issues involved were comparable, UNHCR would remain committed to its core mandate, and no additional funds would be required.

26. UNHCR was a key partner for Australia in the delivery of assistance and implementation of asylum policy at both the national and regional levels. Her delegation was committed to working with others to enhance consistency of the region's response to all related issues. It also supported the High Commissioner's call for recognition of the crucial contribution of developing countries, many of which continued to accept new arrivals.

27. She wished to urge UNHCR to continue its efforts to promote refugee self-reliance. Australia would contribute to durable solutions by offering resettlement places for UNHCR-identified refugees from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. To alleviate the protracted situation in Nepal, the Government of Bhutan should consider accepting for repatriation cases of special humanitarian concern.

28. UNHCR was one of the most effective of the humanitarian agencies, but could not be expected to deal with the ever more complex set of factors driving population movement on its own. Australia would be increasing its core contribution and providing significant additional funding as needed; it urged other Governments to step up their support as well.

29. **Mr. Mattei** (France) said that the year 2010, which had been considered exceptional in terms of humanitarian crises, had brought yet another succession of mass displacements. Certain events, such as the Libyan revolution, had taken the international community by surprise, but the drought in East Africa, for example, should have been better anticipated with the early-warning systems now in place. The mobilization, coordination and complementarity of efforts by all actors must thus be strengthened, particularly in view of the shrinking of humanitarian space. Measures to adapt to new emergencies must not, however, be taken at the expense of resolving protracted situations. The High Commissioner must thus be commended for reinforcing linkages with development actors.

30. The gap between the UNHCR approved budget and revenue was a matter of concern. It pointed to the need for an independent assessment, once the time was ripe, and for implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors. The donor base should also be widened to include, inter alia, the private sector. The High Commissioner should ensure that the forthcoming commemorations served to initiate the broadest possible debate on new global challenges and their consequences for international protection. During its leadership of the natural disaster protection cluster, UNHCR must maintain its dialogue with States and other humanitarian stakeholders.

31. **Mr. Owassa** (Republic of the Congo), speaking as a new member, said that the latest influx of asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had only compounded an already difficult humanitarian situation in his country caused by previous population flows, including from Angola and Rwanda. Tripartite agreements for voluntary return were finally in the implementation stage, thanks to cooperation from all stakeholders and UNHCR. His Government had begun verification procedures immediately following the tripartite meeting of 18 March 2009 held in Cabinda, and a forthcoming meeting would allow for a timetable for voluntary repatriation to be agreed. UNHCR had promoted constructive cooperation between all concerned, and more than 700 Congolese refugees in Gabon had been voluntarily repatriated. His Government would continue to collaborate based on its own country priorities, which included strengthening system capacities for dealing with humanitarian emergencies. New legislation was in preparation to regulate asylum procedures and ensure assistance for internally displaced and resettled persons.

32. His Government's experience highlighted the importance of linking reconciliation and voluntary return efforts, of ensuring a secure and enabling environment in the place of return, and of averting tensions by recognizing the needs of host populations.

33. **Mr. Knutsson** (Sweden) said that over 12 million people in the Horn of Africa would be in acute need of assistance for many years to come. What was needed was a robust, flexible and inclusive humanitarian response system with the focus on coordination, preparedness, prevention and learning from past and ongoing crises. He welcomed the central role played by UNHCR in ensuring the proper functioning of the cluster approach.

34. The dialogue on international protection was as vital today as it had ever been. To meet new challenges and ensure effective protection and support, whether in refugee camps, host families or cities, new tools and methods should be considered. Humanitarian and development actors must cooperate to build flexible systems, identify durable solutions and address root causes. Encouraging self-sufficiency and local ownership among returning populations and receiving communities was crucial, and coherence should be promoted between the organizations of the Global Migration Group.

35. UNHCR, for its part, should increase its field presence and intensify its focus on results and efficiency. Results-based management and other important reforms were being consolidated throughout the organization and, as a token of its strong support, Sweden had made most of its annual contribution to UNHCR unearmarked. It urged other countries to follow suit.

36. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding first to comments made by the representative of Norway, said that the Nansen Principles that had emerged from the Oslo Conference in June 2011 would guide the international community's response to the problem of the dramatic impact of climate change on displacement. The Norwegian Refugee Council provided the best data on conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide via its Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre in Geneva. Keeping people in camps was not the objective; the focus must be on adequate protection measurements and durable solutions.

37. He wished to assure the representative of Djibouti that the discussion on the more recent flows into Kenya and Ethiopia did not mean that his Government's generosity had been forgotten, particularly its reopening of the Holl Holl camp for refugees from southern Somalia. The recent agreement signed in Mogadishu had certainly marked an important step forward in the political domain.

38. The representative of Germany had done well to highlight the need for a system-wide approach to staff security. Cooperation was already under way in that connection with OCHA. Outreach to local populations and other stakeholders based on humanitarian principles was often more important, however, for enhancing staff security than barbed wire and armoured vehicles.

39. Pakistan hosted more refugees than any other country: not only Afghan refugees, but many other persons displaced by conflict and natural disaster. In partnership with the Government, UNHCR was doing its utmost to assist the populations affected. The new Afghan Management and Repatriation Strategy of Pakistan was most welcome, as was the population profiling, verification and response exercise under way.

40. Ensuring the stability of refugee-impacted areas in Pakistan was in the interests of the entire region, and he wished to echo the appeal of the representative of Pakistan for support for development programmes. UNHCR was working with all Governments concerned to ensure the success of the forthcoming international stakeholders conference to be held in Tokyo.

41. He could assure the representative of Switzerland that UNHCR was indeed heeding the recommendations of the United Nations Board of Auditors and that diversification of sources of funding was a priority. Progress on needs assessment had been acknowledged in a recent meeting with the Board; the objective was to ensure perfect accountability.

42. Regarding the difficult situation in Kenya, he was particularly appreciative not only of the generosity of the host population, but also of the personal commitment of the representative of Kenya to refugee protection and to the Government of Kenya for its decision to: allocate more land for the refugees; support a security partnership programme; and consider establishing a refugee screening centre. The recent dramatic inflow of refugees had only compounded the already hopelessly overcrowded situation at the Dadaab camps. The Government of Kenya had recently assumed its responsibility and sovereign right to proceed to the registration of refugees: an important step to ensure their protection. UNHCR would match its commitment and do its best to honour its international obligation to provide support.

43. He wished to thank the Government of Italy for its sterling refugee rescue work at sea and for its efforts to redistribute refugees arriving on the island of Lampedusa to other parts of the country. In that connection, he noted that the probability that a Somali refugee would be recognized as a person requiring protection varied from 3 to 90 per cent across the European Union: that dysfunctional situation could only be resolved with a common European commitment and more effective regulations.

44. Australia had dramatically increased its funding for UNHCR global activities and, alongside the United States of America and Canada, had one of the most exemplary resettlement programmes. He agreed that regional cooperation must be organized in such a way that it actually enhanced refugee protection, with all Governments fully assuming their responsibilities.

45. He endorsed the comments by the representative of France concerning the UNHCR response to new emergencies, the broadening of the donor base, and the forthcoming commemorations and said that UNHCR looked forward to ongoing cooperation with the Government of the Republic of the Congo. He trusted that conditions would allow for the return of Congolese refugees in dignity and security and that families long settled in Gabon would be allowed to remain there.

46. Sweden made the largest contribution to UNHCR activities when measured as a percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP), and the unearmarked nature of its support represented a lifeline for the organization. Although tracing the exact allocation of funding in emergency situations could be problematic, there was no doubt that, in 2011, Swedish funding had been instrumental in ensuring a quick response to the unfolding situations in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Kenya. Unearmarked funding, contrary to popular belief, was not mislaid; it was critical to supporting activities in the most difficult emergencies in areas outside the media's focus before funding became available. What was needed was stronger coordination of the humanitarian system, and, indeed, for the Global Migration Group to engage more effectively. UNHCR would do its best to address all the matters raised by the representative of Sweden.

47. **Mr. Otabe** (Japan) said that, in spite of the disaster that had devastated Japan in 2011, his Government had increased its contribution to UNHCR in 2011, which surpassed what had been considered a record contribution in 2010. The partnership between UNHCR and the Japan International Cooperation Agency had yielded positive results and his country hoped to build on them to ensure a seamless transition from humanitarian to developmental assistance. In that connection, Japan had launched a pioneering pilot project on refugee resettlement.

48. He commended the High Commissioner for his work on structural reform and encouraged him to further improve financial, risk and performance management in the light of the recent report by the United Nations Board of Auditors. UNHCR should furthermore continue to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian activities, particularly through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

49. Turning to the subject of the growing funding gap, he said that UNHCR should intensify its efforts to broaden its donor base. Furthermore, there should be greater access to pooled funding mechanisms and greater cooperation with the private sector. Information on best practices involving collaboration with the private sector should be made available on the UNHCR website so as to raise awareness among those in charge of corporate social responsibility issues.

50. **Mr. Numanovic** (Montenegro) said that Montenegro, which had one of the world's highest inflows of displaced persons compared to the size of its population, had adopted a strategy in 2011 to find a permanent and sustainable solution to address the situation of displaced and internally displaced persons in Montenegro. The strategy, which was designed to be implemented in cooperation with the international community and in accordance with international norms, focused on integration and voluntary repatriation. Integration measures involved: the delivery of information to the displaced about regulating their legal status and exercising socio-economic rights in Montenegro; greater access to quality health care; and a wider range of education services. An employment policy would be implemented, with special emphasis on work for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian women, and adequate housing would be provided for those living in poor conditions, especially in the country's Konik camps. Voluntary repatriation opportunities would be offered and those who took them up would be fully informed about the situation in the home country and the possibility for them to exercise rights there. A committee led by the Deputy Prime Minister had been established to monitor the implementation of the strategy.

51. A campaign had been launched to raise awareness among displaced persons of their rights and of the procedure for applying for the status of permanent resident alien in Montenegro. In that connection, the Government had helped a number of internally displaced persons living in the Konik camps to travel to Kosovo to obtain the documents required for their applications.

52. Montenegro was actively participating in the Belgrade Initiative, a programme aimed at finding a permanent solution for refugees and internally displaced persons in the region. His Government looked to the international community and donors to fully support the projects developed under the programme, which would be presented at a forthcoming donors' conference.

53. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) commended UNHCR on its rapid response to the situation in Libya and Somalia. He recalled that Morocco had been one of the first countries to heed the High Commissioner's plea for support by setting up a hospital close to the Libyan border. The hospital was staffed by specialized doctors and paramedics and possessed large quantities of medical supplies.

54. As protracted refugee situations were often the result of political manipulation, UNHCR should not desist in its efforts to find durable solutions for such situations. In that connection, while Morocco supported the efforts of UNHCR to ensure autonomy for refugees, autonomy was no substitute for durable solutions, namely, voluntary repatriation, local integration or resettlement.

55. He welcomed the internal reforms instituted by the High Commissioner and the steps taken to rationalize the budget, programmes and human resources procedures and to broaden the donor base by including the private sector and civil society. For its part,

Morocco had institutionalized its voluntary contributions and, the global financial crisis notwithstanding, had made a non-earmarked contribution of US\$ 1 million.

56. The internal reform process of UNHCR was important for strengthening the response, adaptation and analytical capacity, as were efforts to strengthen and rationalize the organization's human resource management strategy. Training, professionalism, diversity and respect for the principle of equitable geographical representation should be recognized as core elements of any management strategy to improve the organization's operational efficiency. Given the large number of challenges, every effort must be made to avoid wasting resources and to prevent extensive food aid operations, for example, from overshadowing or detracting from the protection of refugees' rights and dignity.

57. Morocco supported the High Commissioner's proposal to revitalize the dialogues on international protection challenges, which should be complemented with initiatives to discuss emerging challenges.

58. **Mr. Gatsinzi** (Rwanda) said that, despite its economic development issues, Rwanda remained committed to welcoming back Rwandan returnees. To that end, the Government had launched a targeted programme to help overcome the challenges facing returnees in rural areas.

59. The Government attached great importance to becoming a full member of the UNHCR Executive Committee, which would allow it to join forces with the international community to protect refugees. His Government looked to the international community to continue to support the socio-economic reintegration of returnees and to persuade Rwandan refugees to return to their country. Expressing appreciation to UNHCR for supporting Rwanda as it moved towards unity and reconciliation, he said that appropriate measures had been taken to ensure that the cessation clause was invoked as planned.

60. **Mr. Smorodin** (Russian Federation) said that international cooperation in the humanitarian field, such as that undertaken by UNHCR, was vital to world peace and security. The international protection regime must continue, however, to be regulated by the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol; the mandate of UNHCR should not be changed and the humanitarian and non-political character of UNHCR activities must be retained.

61. UNHCR should intensify its efforts to help interested States strengthen national protection mechanisms and asylum systems. The key role of the Executive Committee in implementing decisions relating to the international protection of refugees should be preserved.

62. The Russian Federation was following events in several African States with concern and hoped that the authorities would manage to avert humanitarian catastrophes leading to mass population flows.

63. The Executive Committee should be encouraged to continue its efforts to reduce statelessness and the High Commissioner to press more actively for a solution to the decades-long issue of mass statelessness in Latvia.

64. Over the past four years, his Government had granted citizenship to more than a quarter of a million stateless persons; more than 40,000 had been offered temporary residency; and a similar number full residency permits pending naturalization.

65. As part of the forthcoming commemorations, States should be encouraged to assume additional voluntary commitments for the protection of refugees and the suppression of statelessness. Consultations were under way with UNHCR in that connection, with the involvement of Russian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). His Government was grateful to UNHCR for its assistance in preparing asylum legislation and training asylum officers. The number of persons seeking asylum in the Russian Federation had rocketed:

some 13,000 from 87 countries in the past four years alone. Over that same period, asylum had been granted to more than 6,000; refugee status to approximately 1,000; and temporary residency to over 5,000 persons. Integration was part of the package, and persons granted refugee status could apply for citizenship within a year. A regional resettlement system was being established, and he commended UNHCR for its efforts to secure durable solutions and for the reforms it was implementing.

66. **Ms. Richmond** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) paid tribute to the humanitarian workers who had lost their lives in the line of duty and said that she condemned attacks against humanitarian workers in the strongest terms. She called upon all parties to respect international humanitarian law and the principles regarding respect for humanitarian space and neutrality.

67. The humanitarian community's response to the complex challenges that had arisen in 2011 demonstrated that agencies were most effective when they worked together to achieve common objectives. As a large operational agency, it was only right that UNHCR was among the leaders of humanitarian reform, and she trusted that the organization would support the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, as well as OCHA in the field.

68. Her Government fully supported the UNHCR inter-agency approach and viewed the cluster approach as a mechanism that had greatly enhanced the predictability and equity of humanitarian assistance delivery. In that connection, it supported the decision taken by UNHCR to conduct a timely performance review of the global protection cluster and encouraged the organization to pursue efforts aimed at improving the humanitarian coordinator system and clarifying roles and responsibilities.

69. In order to develop resilience to future disasters and to improving the sustainability of humanitarian relief efforts, the capacity of national Governments should be boosted and local knowledge and expertise should be used to tailor approaches to local circumstances. Measures to improve forecasting capacity would furthermore increase preparedness.

70. Commending the work done to consolidate the UNHCR structural and management change programme and needs-based planning processes, she said that the organization should refine its approach to results-based management so as to ensure that its resources achieved their maximum impact.

71. Turning to UNHCR financial and management oversight mechanisms, she welcomed the decision to establish an independent audit committee. While the weaknesses thrown into relief by the report of the United Nations Board of Auditors were a cause for concern, the organization had taken the first step by accepting all recommendations. It should now implement them and report back on the progress made at the next meeting of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

72. UNHCR had done commendable work to increase resettlement opportunities. Resettlement was an essential protection tool and should enjoy a similar status to voluntary repatriation and local integration, as it could act as a catalyst for other comprehensive solutions.

73. **Mr. Delga** (Benin) said that, in 1992, UNHCR had registered more than 150,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Benin; the current figure was estimated at 8,000.

74. His Government considered that the welfare of every refugee should be a priority. Thus, it had undertaken to strengthen the voluntary repatriation process in order to allow those wishing to return to Benin to do so in safety.

75. The Government had launched awareness-raising campaigns aimed at promoting local integration and widening the range of income-generating activities available to

returnees. However, the initiative continued to face many obstacles, notably an almost complete lack of financial resources. Indeed, resource issues had caused the repatriation operations that were under way in 2007 to grind to a halt. Significant financial resources were required and the Government of Benin therefore requested support from UNHCR in order to deal with the refugees who remained in Benin, even though security in their home country had improved. Lastly, the National Assembly of Benin would soon endorse accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

76. **Mr. Himanen** (Finland) said that in May 2011 Helsinki had hosted a regional dialogue meeting with refugee women and girls which had concluded the series of UNHCR regional dialogues held worldwide. It was hoped that the needs of refugee women and children in particular would be discussed at the ministerial-level meeting to be held in Geneva in December 2011 to mark the anniversaries of the 1951 and 1961 conventions.

77. In 2010 the response capacity of the international community had been stretched to the limit and the crises in Africa in 2011 had added to the strain on the UNHCR budget. The challenge was compounded by shrinking humanitarian space and concern for the safety of humanitarian personnel. Faced with the rising costs of operations, UNHCR needed to diversify its funding base and build on structural and management reforms. Flexible and innovative approaches would be needed to bridge the growing gap between needs and resources.

78. He welcomed the organization's efforts to strengthen strategic partnerships and encouraged it to take further steps towards an enhanced, system-wide approach to humanitarian assistance. For Finland, which had been settling refugees for almost 40 years, UNHCR continued to be the largest recipient of its humanitarian assistance and a key partner in resettlement activities. He called upon the donor community to heed the High Commissioner's plea and to increase flexibility and predictability in funding.

79. Lastly, he commended the organizers of the Ministerial Conference on Humanitarian Assistance and Internal Displacement in West Africa that had been held in Abuja in July 2011. The event had been an important step towards the implementation of the Kampala Convention.

80. **Ms. Batistić Kos** (Croatia) drew attention to a housing programme that Croatia was implementing for returnees and former tenancy rights holders which was fully financed out of the State budget. The processes of reconstruction of war-damaged property and of property repossession were continuing at a vigorous pace, accompanied by a new programme for the construction of 550 family houses. Croatia remained fully committed to implementing all programmes for returnees and looked to other countries in the region to develop similar national projects.

81. Under the agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, establishing the Regional Programme on Refugee Return and Provision of Durable Solutions to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Western Balkans, adequate housing solutions were to be provided for vulnerable refugees and displaced persons in need. That was an important step towards resolving the refugee situation in the region. She expressed appreciation for the support and contributions of UNHCR, the European Commission, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Government of the United States of America in connection with the programme and related processes.

82. Croatia had recently acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, a step that confirmed the country's commitment to preventing statelessness and to joining concerted global efforts to do so. In that connection, it was of crucial importance to reconfirm the core legal standards, principles and values underpinning the international protection of refugees and stateless persons.

83. **Mr. Smidt** (Denmark) commended UNHCR for its handling of a series of high-profile refugee crises in 2011, such as the crisis in the Horn of Africa. His country supported refugees from and internally displaced people in Somalia through its “Regions of Origin” programme and assisted the local authorities and host communities in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen that were coping with the situation. While the provision of humanitarian aid remained crucial, a long-term approach to refugee assistance was required. Such an approach was at the heart of a decision by Denmark to provide a new two-year grant of approximately US\$ 10 million to support the UNHCR response to the African crisis.

84. His Government supported the UNHCR management and administrative reforms and welcomed the progress achieved in many areas. However, it was concerned by the financial management shortcomings noted by the United Nations Board of Auditors in its report for 2010 and looked forward to receiving information on progress in tackling those issues. He strongly encouraged UNHCR to continue strengthening its oversight and accountability functions, commended it for its work to date on establishing an independent audit committee, and said that he looked forward to the introduction of International Public Sector Accounting Standards in 2012.

85. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the points raised, expressed his appreciation that, despite the tragedy that Japan had suffered earlier in the year, its Government had dramatically increased its financial support to UNHCR for 2011. He welcomed the adoption by Montenegro of integration and voluntary repatriation strategies as durable solutions. He expressed the hope that, with the support of the international community, the region would be able to close a tragic chapter in European refugee history.

86. He agreed fully with the observations made by the representative of Morocco and was grateful for the support provided by Morocco to the work of UNHCR. He noted the commitment of the Government of Rwanda to the road map drawn up to resolve the refugee situation. UNHCR stood ready to provide assistance in that process.

87. UNHCR was relying on the commitment of the Government of the Russian Federation to developing those activities that a country experiencing massive inflows of refugees and migrants needed to put in place. A fully effective asylum system there would be a major contribution to the global protection of refugees. He appreciated the progress made in the Russian Federation to reduce statelessness.

88. Commenting on the statement by the representative of the United Kingdom, he said that cooperation and coordination were indeed essential in ensuring that humanitarian action was effective. To that end, UNHCR was supporting efforts by Valerie Amos, the Under Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to strengthen humanitarian reform and was working to fully assume its responsibilities with regard to cluster coordination, inter-agency cooperation and information sharing in the coordination of refugee emergencies. While progress had been made, more was needed.

89. He noted that, in recent years, UNHCR had been able to greatly increase its activity by reducing headquarters and staff costs. In line with the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, the organization was now giving priority to making further improvements in emergency response, accountability and results-based management.

90. Underscoring the generosity of the Government of Benin in hosting refugees, he said that UNHCR would work with that country to find lasting solutions to the refugee situation there, and he called for support from the international community in that regard.

91. He expressed appreciation to the Government of Finland for its engagement in the preparations for the upcoming anniversary commemorations and in the regional dialogue

exercise involving refugee women. He agreed with the representative of Finland that it was crucial to hear the perspective of refugees themselves, especially women.

92. He commended the Governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia for developing a common strategy on durable solutions for refugee situations in the region and he strongly urged the international community to support their efforts. He welcomed the pioneering “Regions of Origin” programme developed by Denmark and said that he looked forward to working, with the support of Denmark, on implementation of the programme in the Horn of Africa in 2011 and 2012.

93. **Mr. Phuangketkeow** (Thailand) said that Thailand was host to more than 140,000 displaced persons and other persons of concern. The past year had seen notable achievements, including the issuance of birth certificates to over 1,500 displaced persons. Information campaigns to sensitize camp residents to the right to birth registration were planned, and admission criteria were being refined and broadened. His Government planned to enhance the delivery of vocational training, medical services and other assistance to prepare individuals for voluntary return and resettlement opportunities as they became available.

94. Thailand welcomed the positive developments in Myanmar since that country’s recent general elections; those developments could provide a window of opportunity for UNHCR and the international community to lay the groundwork for long-term solutions there. He emphasized that any future refugee return process would be undertaken in close consultation with all parties, including returnees, and with protection of the latter’s safety and dignity as a prerequisite.

95. Thailand was committed to pursuing regional and global solutions to humanitarian challenges and was working closely with UNHCR and those involved in the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime to address those challenges. He commended UNHCR for its efforts to facilitate the realization of a comprehensive regional approach through the establishment of a regional cooperation framework.

96. **The Chairperson** said that on a visit to Thailand in May 2011 he had seen the remarkable work that Thailand was doing as host to large numbers of refugees along its border with Myanmar. At his suggestion, a permanent childcare centre had been established in an immigration detention centre, and he expressed appreciation to the Government of Thailand and donors for making that possible.

97. **Mr. Corr** (Ireland) said that his country was preparing new immigration and asylum legislation that would reform and simplify the refugee status determination process. It was anticipated that the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill would significantly reduce the time required to reach a final decision on applications.

98. Turning to the challenges facing UNHCR, he expressed concern at the continuing tendency for refugee situations to become protracted and welcomed efforts by UNHCR to find better ways of quantifying and acknowledging the contribution of host countries dealing with large numbers of refugees over many years. He expressed concern about protection gaps that left children, who represented half of all persons of concern to UNHCR, in a situation of great vulnerability, about discrimination and abuse suffered by refugees and other persons of concern on the basis of their sexual orientation and about gender-based violence in the context of displacement. He welcomed the High Commissioner’s commitment to strengthening the capacity of UNHCR to deal with existing and emerging protection challenges and urged UNHCR to continue its work to protect and assist internally displaced persons.

99. He urged UNHCR to continue its engagement with the work being led by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to improve the effectiveness and coherence of the international response to humanitarian emergencies and to ensure accountability within the system and to beneficiaries. He furthermore encouraged UNHCR to engage fully and constructively with the roll-out of the methodologies developed recently by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Needs Assessment for coordinated needs assessment in humanitarian emergencies.

100. **Ms. Terstal** (Netherlands) said that, while the primary responsibility for protecting refugees lay with host countries, the international community must support those countries and help protect those in need. Her country recognized the burden borne by host countries and, in that connection, intended to explore ways of enhancing protection for Somali refugees in Kenya.

101. Gaining access to people of concern, including urban refugees, was becoming more difficult, as the humanitarian space was shrinking and the security of humanitarian workers was being compromised. She called on all parties to respect humanitarian law and encouraged UNHCR to continue working with States and partners to protect urban refugees.

102. Turning to the subject of durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, she encouraged UNHCR to enhance its cooperation with development actors on the Transition Solutions Initiative and called on all actors to participate actively in the process and to take account of the interests of people of concern and the host communities in their development efforts.

103. With regard to ensuring a strong and effective UNHCR, she welcomed the decision by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to pilot arrangements for designating a lead agency to coordinate the protection response in the event of natural disasters and the role assigned to UNHCR in those arrangements. She encouraged UNHCR to work with other United Nations agencies to deliver better results on the ground and applauded recent UNHCR efforts to reach out to non-traditional donors. She welcomed recent improvements in the organization's management and financial oversight and urged UNHCR to increase its cost-effectiveness, as recommended by the Board of Auditors.

104. Lastly, she encouraged States to accede to or ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

105. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), responding to the points raised, said that Thailand was an important asylum country and was making a key contribution to maintaining protection space in South-East Asia. The region's complex refugee problem would benefit from a regional approach. He welcomed the new legislation being proposed in Ireland and expressed the hope that it would further enhance protection space in that country. He agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on preventing and addressing gender-based violence in refugee situations.

106. The remarks by the representative of the Netherlands on the links between access, security as a prerequisite for the delivery of protection and the need to focus on solutions echoed the strategy and priorities of UNHCR.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.