



General Assembly

Distr.: General
23 January 2020
English
Original: French

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventieth session

Summary record of the 727th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 11 October 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Delmi..... (Algeria)

Contents

- Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2020–2021
- Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations
- Other statements
- Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2020
- Consideration of the provisional agenda of the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee
- Election of officers
- Any other business
- Adoption of the report of the seventieth session of the Executive Committee
- Closing of the session

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.19-17762 (E) 220120 230120



* 1 9 1 7 7 6 2 *

Please recycle The recycling symbol, consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.



The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2020–2021
(A/AC.96/1191 and Add.1)

1. **Ms. Hopp** (Germany) said that Germany's unearmarked contributions were double what they had been in 2018 and its contributions to regional programmes were made on a multi-year basis. Protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa remained a pressing matter, given the large number of displaced persons in African countries and the funding gap of over 60 per cent on the continent. While she welcomed the increased financial resources allocated for operations in Yemen, she also called for increased protection activities for IDPs in Syria and recalled that protection measures and humanitarian assistance must remain at the core of operations related to spontaneous returns. Given its limited funding, it was key for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to prioritize its protection and humanitarian mandate.

2. In implementing the global compact on refugees, the role of UNHCR should be to mobilize funds and initiate development-oriented programmes. She encouraged UNHCR to cooperate with the World Bank in order to leverage International Development Association (IDA) funds for refugee protection. Finally, the launch of the comprehensive refugee response framework and the implementation of the global compact on refugees should not be regarded as mere exercises engaged in by a few countries, but rather should be integrated into the approach taken to address refugee situations.

3. **Ms. O'Connell** (United States of America) said that, once again, the UNHCR budget for 2020–2021 reflected the extraordinary humanitarian needs of IDPs around the world. The United States maintained its steadfast support for UNHCR and was the organization's largest donor. It was, however, not sustainable for three main donors to continue providing almost 60 per cent of the contributions. The Global Refugee Forum offered an opportunity to expand the donor base. While the Office's increasing private-sector fundraising and partnerships were commendable, the burden must be shared more broadly, equitably and predictably.

4. In addition, UNHCR must control costs and implement tangible efficiencies. She appreciated that the budget under consideration included savings stemming from, among other things, lower needs in some programmes, better equipment management and revised population projections. She welcomed the organization's efforts to lower back-office costs through the Business Innovations Group.

5. Given the continued funding gaps, UNHCR must continue to prioritize its funding allocations, putting persons of concern first. It was hoped that the regionalization of its operations would help in that process. She welcomed the plans to decrease its programme support costs to 6.5 per cent starting in 2020 and to decrease its operational reserve that year, given the significant difference between the amount budgeted and the amount needed in 2019. She appreciated the Office's work in addressing multiple global crises while maintaining existing operations in protracted settings. Maintaining an open dialogue with Executive Committee members, partners and persons of concern would help maintain trust in the organization and commitment to its mission.

6. **Ms. Cardoso Benedetti** (Brazil) said that the number of persons of concern to UNHCR was rising in the Americas region and it appeared that the aid provided to those persons came largely from the countries of the region. It was hoped that the decentralization and regionalization process would lead not only to greater cost-efficiency, but also to better support for persons of concern and a closer dialogue with host countries. Periodic meetings with regional directors could be an occasion for regularly briefing Member States on the work of the regional offices. She hoped regionalization would lead to greater representation of the Americas region among the organization's international staff, particularly in senior positions.

7. **Mr. Voorhoeve** (Netherlands) said that UNHCR finances remained sound, but the growing funding gap was a matter of concern. Recalling that the Netherlands was one of the largest donors of unearmarked funds, he encouraged other countries to follow its example and called for an increase in contributions from the private sector.

8. **Ms. Clements** (Deputy High Commissioner), thanking the countries for their support and efforts, said that the Office also hoped that the Global Refugee Forum would be an occasion for obtaining commitments and contributions. UNHCR was driven by the desire to be effective and was committed to reporting regularly on its work, beyond Executive Committee meetings. The decentralization and regionalization process would likely result in monthly meetings being held for that purpose.

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters (A/AC.96/1191, annex VI)

9. **Ms. Ayesha** (Rapporteur) said that she wished to draw delegations' attention to the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, paragraph (a) of which contained a proposal to approve the revised programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2019, amounting to US\$ 8,635,927,469. She also wished to draw attention to paragraph (c) of the draft general decision, which contained a proposal to approve the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2020, amounting to US\$ 8,667,680,981, and the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2021, amounting to US\$ 8,615,834,612. Under the draft decision, the Executive Committee also authorized the High Commissioner to create supplementary budgets and issue special appeals in case of emergency needs that could not be met fully from the operational reserve. Under paragraph (f) of the draft general decision, the Executive Committee recognized the valuable contribution of refugee-hosting countries and urged Member States to participate in efforts to promote durable solutions and more equitable and predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing. At the informal preparatory consultations held on 12 September 2019, Member States had agreed to add the words "and predictable" to the draft decision contained in document [A/AC.96/1191](#). It was the revised decision that was now proposed for adoption.

10. **The Chair** said that he took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft biennial programme budget 2020–2021 set out in the draft general decision, as amended.

11. *It was so decided.*

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

12. **Mr. Aslam Daud** (Rapporteur of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations) said that the 2019 annual consultations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), addressing the theme "Working Together, Better", had brought together 453 participants from 243 organizations and 76 countries. The three core focus areas of the consultations had been data evidence, regionalization and the Global Refugee Forum.

13. While displacement situations were all different, they shared several commonalities with respect to good practices in the collection, analysis and use of data on displacement. A shared conceptual framework was needed across the board. It was recommended that regional-level meetings should be held during the annual consultations to present and discuss collective outcomes arising from the data and evidence. Affected communities needed to be included throughout the programme cycle.

14. With the increase in global refugee movements, regionalization and decentralization were of paramount importance in promoting greater collaboration with all parties involved. The decentralization of the Office's work must be accompanied by a transfer or delegation of power to other entities such as country offices, regional bureaux and regional headquarters. UNHCR regional bureaux must also be better equipped.

15. Building on the global compact on refugees, the Global Refugee Forum would give States the opportunity to come together and strengthen the international response to refugee movements. It would focus on six areas: arrangements for responsibility-sharing; education; jobs and livelihood; energy and infrastructure; solutions, including repatriation; local integration and resettlement; and enhancing efforts to strengthen the protection capacity of Member States. The NGOs and UNHCR had agreed that refugees needed to be integrated into host communities rather than being placed in isolated camps. It was also felt that NGOs and UNHCR needed to work together to increase the involvement of the private sector. The

Global Refugee Forum would also focus on developing solutions to ease pressures on host countries by enhancing refugee self-reliance, expanding access to third-country solutions, and supporting conditions in countries of origin so that refugees could return safely and with dignity.

16. It had emerged from the consultations that refugees needed to be given access to quality education and to be involved in developing the educational programmes intended for them. NGOs should also create new partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders in the private sector, while upholding humanitarian principles, and strengthen existing partnerships. In addition, UNHCR must work with governments to ensure the sustainability of programmes. Furthermore, UNHCR and NGOs must adopt an approach aimed at refugee leadership, including through the involvement of youth and the promotion of refugee-led initiatives.

17. The outcomes of the Global Refugee Forum could not be implemented without resources. Consequently, during the consultations, participants had considered the potential use of Islamic social finance, with a particular focus on zakat. The NGOs had welcomed the idea, but felt that UNHCR would need to ensure that there would be no threat to faith-based organizations that depended on Islamic social finance. The NGOs and UNHCR had also had an important conversation on preventing sexual misconduct. It was recommended that all organizations should raise awareness of the issue and clearly commit to fighting such misconduct.

18. **Ms. O’Connell** (United States of America) said that UNHCR could not carry out its work without the valuable assistance of NGOs. She hoped that, in the context of the ongoing reforms, UNHCR would take account of the importance of that partnership. The practice of the United States of America was to invite representatives of two NGOs to participate in delegations attending UNHCR Executive Committee sessions. She encouraged other States to adopt the practice, including for the Global Refugee Forum. She encouraged UNHCR to continue using the annual partnership survey, an excellent tool for monitoring and transparency, and to promote the survey in connection with the regionalization process. The theme of the 2019 consultations, “Working Together, Better”, was particularly timely, as it was important to bolster collaboration among the different stakeholders. She also welcomed the regional multi-partner consultations that had been held as part of the 2019 consultations. Finally, she wished to know how implementation of the recommendations contained in the report on the annual consultations between UNHCR and NGOs would be monitored and reported on.

19. **Mr. Aslam Daud** (Rapporteur of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations) said that the implementation of the recommendations would be reviewed regularly and that NGOs would be able to engage in an ongoing dialogue with UNHCR. Regionalization would help the different regions work more closely with NGOs and implement the recommendations.

Other statements

20. **Mr. Avognon** (Chair of UNHCR Staff Council) said that while staff members were aware of the importance of the organization’s decentralization process, many were being affected negatively by it. With the changes fully under way, it was essential that adequate measures be taken to address staff members’ concerns and to equip them to adapt to the challenges of the future. UNHCR had a rotation policy for professional staff, which meant that, at different times during their careers, those staff members would be in between assignments. A recently adopted administrative instruction provided that staff members in between assignments could be placed on leave without pay after a cumulative period of nine months, causing great unease among the staff members concerned. Managers’ ability to hire staff externally jeopardized those staff members’ prospects of being reassigned, despite their skills and many years of loyal service to UNHCR. The necessary steps should be taken to ensure that there would be no prejudice to staff members in that situation.

21. Abuse of authority by certain managers, particularly acute in some regional offices, was also a source of serious concern. He commended the organization for tackling the issue and encouraged it to handle complaints in an impartial and equal manner, regardless of the

grade of the person involved. In addition, complainants and whistle-blowers should be protected from retaliation.

22. The issue of imbalances in geographical representation had been raised at the previous meeting of the Standing Committee. Steps had been taken to achieve greater gender parity, but further efforts were needed to ensure that women from all regions were represented on an equal footing with men.

23. The conditions of service in remote duty stations should also be improved, particularly for locally recruited personnel. The insecurity of land transport and the prohibitive cost of air travel prevented many such staff members from leaving their duty stations, often for long periods of time. Expanded transportation opportunities for them would be appreciated.

24. Another issue needing attention was medical expenses that some hospitals required to be paid in advance, forcing local staff in the regions affected to make large upfront payments. A card system based on the pilot project in East Africa should be instituted in as many duty stations as possible so that staff members and their families would not be compelled to make such upfront payments. Further work also needed to be done with respect to medical evacuations of staff from remote, high-risk duty stations.

25. With the policy on staff recruitment and assignment having been fully implemented, the Staff Council reiterated its call for the policy on contracts to be revised to allow for the use of the three types of contracts provided for in the staff rules (temporary, fixed-term and continuing), which would help meet staff aspirations with respect to career growth and job security. The disparate and differential treatment between staff members and the more than 4,000 affiliate workforce members recruited by UNHCR to perform the same functions without the same entitlements was a source of much frustration. The Staff Council therefore called upon the organization to review its policy on the matter. Lastly, it was hoped that the International Civil Service Commission would review certain aspects of its work, as staff members had noted a worrying series of inconsistencies in the salary survey methodologies that it had applied. Inequalities in pay among staff members at the same grade could be observed at several duty stations.

26. **The Chair** said that he wished to thank the Chair of the UNHCR Staff Council for his statement and was counting on the Staff Council to keep the organization informed of developments affecting staff. He also wished to thank the staff for their unwavering dedication. All possible support needed to be provided to those working on the ground, in conditions that were often extremely difficult.

Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2020

Consideration of the provisional agenda of the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee

27. **Ms. Ayesha** (Rapporteur) said that she wished to draw delegations' attention to decisions 2 to 5, which, respectively, concerned the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2020, observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2019–2020, the provisional agenda of the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee, and the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings. The decisions would be annexed to the report of the current session, which would be submitted for adoption at the end of the session.

28. **The Chair** said that, with regard to the draft decision on observer participation in the meetings of the Standing Committee in 2019–2020, a number of States had made official requests to participate in the meetings of the Standing Committee as observers, namely Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Mali, Malta and Zimbabwe. Those requests being in order, he proposed that the names of the States concerned should be added to the agreed text of the draft decision.

29. *It was so decided.*

30. **The Chair** said he took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the four decisions in question.

31. *It was so decided.*

Election of officers

32. **Mr. Freiherr von Ungern-Sternberg** (Germany) nominated Mr. Muylle (Belgium) for the office of Chair of the Executive Committee.

33. **Mr. Onek** (Uganda) seconded the nomination.

34. *Mr. Muylle (Belgium) was elected Chair of the Executive Committee by acclamation.*

35. **Mr. Flores Liera** (Mexico) nominated Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil) for the office of first Vice-Chair of the Committee.

36. **Mr. da Conceição** (Mozambique) seconded the nomination.

37. *Ms. Farani Azevêdo (Brazil) was elected first Vice-Chair of the Committee.*

38. **The Chair** said that the Asia-Pacific Group, to whom it fell to nominate the second Vice-Chair, had not yet reached an agreement. He proposed that the Executive Committee should be informed of the name of the candidate once it was known and that the candidate should then be elected by silent procedure.

39. *It was so decided.*

40. **Ms. Bindu** (Zimbabwe) nominated Ms. Keah (Kenya) for the office of Rapporteur.

41. **Mr. Akanda** (Bangladesh) seconded the nomination.

42. *Ms. Keah (Kenya) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

43. **Mr. Muylle** (Belgium) thanked the members of the Committee for the trust they placed in him and paid tribute to UNHCR staff, who were working every day to improve the lives of millions of refugees and IDPs around the world. Cooperation was needed in order to meet the challenges of the future and to ensure that all voices were heard.

Any other business

44. *As no delegation wished to take the floor, the agenda item was considered closed.*

Adoption of the report of the seventieth session of the Executive Committee (document without a symbol, distributed in the meeting room)

45. **Ms. Ayesha** (Rapporteur) briefly introduced the draft report of the seventieth session. Sections I and II provided an overview of the proceedings of the session. Section III comprised the following five decisions: the decision on the 2020–2021 budget, the decision on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2020, the decision on observer participation, the decision on the provisional agenda for the seventy-first session of the Executive Committee, and the decision on the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee. Lastly, the annex contained the Chair's summary of the general debate. Once adopted, the report would be presented to the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report.

46. **Mr. Heidari** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation had noted that the draft report did not refer to certain issues raised during the discussions by the representative of Iran and by other delegations, namely the need to ensure a more equitable geographical distribution of refugees around the world, thereby putting an end to the policy of concentrating refugee populations in a few developing countries; to ensure a proper balance between the normative and practical aspects of refugee protection; and to take into account the impact of the inhumane, unilateral and coercive measures that sanctions represented on the situation of refugees in a large host country. He also regretted the attempts by certain countries to politicize Executive Committee discussions.

47. *The draft report of the Executive Committee on the work of the seventieth session was adopted.*

Closing of the session

48. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the outgoing Bureau for its work and the support which it had given him throughout the past year. He warmly congratulated the new Bureau on its election. He said that it was important to sustain the momentum that had brought about the global compact on refugees. The international community had the tools to make responsibility-sharing work, but it needed to ensure that happened. Recent events had shown why it was needed: tens of thousands of people had fled their homes as a result of the escalation of conflict in northern Syria, and hundreds of thousands more were at risk amid active hostilities as the cold weather was setting in. It was important for aid agencies to have access to civilians in order to avert a deepening humanitarian crisis. The position of UNHCR on refugee returns, in Syria and elsewhere, was clear: refugees had the right to return to their homes if they wished and, if they did return, should receive support. However, it was essential that those returns should be the result of a free and informed choice. Recently in the Mediterranean, 13 people had drowned and 15 were missing after a boat had capsized off the coast of Italy. The capacity to rescue at sea must be fully restored and supported. Three more European countries planned to join efforts to establish urgently-needed temporary arrangements for predictable disembarkation. He hoped that other countries would follow suit. In the Horn of Africa, several hundred Somali farmers and pastoralists had taken refuge in Ethiopia, fleeing drought and Al-Shabaab extortion demands. The intersection between climate change and forced displacement was a matter of the utmost importance and had been touched on repeatedly throughout the current session. How UNHCR and its partners would address the problem would be a major focus of the Committee's future work.

49. The compact was a highly relevant and practical set of arrangements that provided a way forward in a range of very different contexts. Many delegations had referred to the need to strengthen the interface between humanitarian and development action in the forced displacement context. That meant supporting host countries where humanitarian action was centred on protection and inclusion of refugees in development planning and funding. Enormous strides had been made in that area. For example, the area of Ethiopia receiving refugees had benefited from important investments from the Ethiopian Government, the World Bank and the private sector, and that was transforming the lives of refugees and local communities.

50. With respect to statelessness, 316 formal pledges had been received from 88 governments and civil society, international and regional organizations on implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness. Five States had pledged to remove provisions in their nationality laws that discriminated against women. States that had not yet taken such steps were encouraged to do so. Pledges would feed into the Global Refugee Forum outcome document and would be followed up on. He hoped that States that had not yet made pledges as part of the #IBelong campaign had been inspired to do so.

51. The Global Refugee Forum would be a historic event where government leaders would gather to lay the building blocks for implementation of the compact on refugees, together with business, international organizations, experts, civil society and refugees. One of the co-convenors of the Forum, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia, had just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. All participants were encouraged to showcase successes, speak frankly about challenges, and announce new measures to ease pressure on host countries, promote refugee self-reliance, and advance the search for new solutions. The Forum should inspire and bring about innovative partnerships with the aim of showing that a solution to forced displacement was possible.

52. Following an exchange of courtesies, **the Chair** declared closed the seventieth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.