



General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 October 2020

Original: English

Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 734th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 8 October 2020, at 9 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Farani Azevêdo(Brazil)

Contents

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee (*continued*)

(a) International protection (*continued*)

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2020–2021 (revised)

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

Other statements

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 of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.20-13217 (E) 141020 161020



* 2 0 1 3 2 1 7 *

Please recycle



The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee *(continued)*

(a) International protection *(continued)* (A/AC.96/1199, A/AC.96/1200, A/AC.96/1206 and A/AC.96/1208)

1. **Mr. Schröder** (Germany) said that measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19, including border closures, should be non-discriminatory, proportionate and limited in duration. Germany was deeply concerned about the secondary impacts of the pandemic and looked forward to sharing experiences and ideas at the 2020 High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges. His Government had redirected €150 million from its 2020 budget to strengthen service-providing structures and help stabilize fragile regions affected by displacement. It was the third-largest donor to the "Education Cannot Wait" fund and, as it had pledged at the Global Refugee Forum, would launch a global network on forced displacement, focused on women as agents of change, to strengthen women's rights and opportunities in situations of forced displacement.

2. Germany supported UNHCR efforts to ensure protection thresholds and monitor protection threats, particularly in the context of principled returns. The principle that returns should be voluntary must be upheld. Germany also supported the move towards more decisive and predictable engagement with internally displaced persons, which the new budget structure, to be discussed subsequently by the Executive Committee, should help to achieve.

3. **Ms. Sundstrom** (Sweden) said that Sweden was proud to be a major resettlement country. Resettlement was a sustainable form of international protection and an act of solidarity with host countries. After placing a temporary hold on resettlement travel in the first half of 2020 owing to the pandemic, Sweden had recently resumed resettlement transfers on a phased basis. It aimed to fulfil its pledge for 2020 and to receive 5,000 refugees, provided that submissions and transfers could continue at a steady pace. As co-chair of the Priority Situations Core Group, Sweden supported an expanded and strategic global resettlement response. It would continue to advocate for greater responsibility-sharing and fair and effective asylum systems within the European Union and welcomed the upcoming discussions on the new European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum. The multifaceted nature of the risks facing people affected by humanitarian crises needed to be recognized. The contribution of other sectors and disciplines to reducing those risks was critical.

4. **Ms. Mejía Molina** (Colombia) said that the immigration status of 45 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants who intended to stay in Colombia had been regularized under new mechanisms introduced by the Government, which included various types of special residence permits. One such permit was available to Venezuelan migrants with an irregular status who received a formal job offer and another allowed Venezuelan schoolchildren to regularize their status and take the State secondary school exams required to attend university. Migrants could access the public health and school systems regardless of their status. More than 800,000 Venezuelan nationals had received care between March 2017 and June 2020 and more than two million vaccine doses had been administered to Venezuelan nationals between August 2017 and June 2020. As at July 2020, 356,000 Venezuelan children and adolescents were enrolled in the school system, mainly in public schools. Given the high concentration of Venezuelan migrants in certain areas, the Government had introduced community strategies to promote social harmony and UNHCR had rolled out a communications strategy to discourage xenophobia. In assisting Venezuelans, Colombia worked with a group of international cooperation agencies, led by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. As at September 2020, only 16 per cent of the amounts requested under the response plan prepared by the group had been funded. Colombia thanked the international community for the support provided and reiterated the urgent call for commitments. With respect to internally displaced persons, Colombia continued to provide assistance and seek durable solutions, with the support of organizations including UNHCR.

5. **Mr. Hage Chahine Assumpção** (Brazil) said that, as indicated in the note on international protection (A/AC.96/1200), Brazil had continued to improve its national asylum system despite the challenges posed by the health crisis. It had simplified the refugee

recognition process, in line with the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, had granted prima facie refugee status to over 50,000 Venezuelans and had provided assistance to over 500,000 Venezuelans, including those travelling through Brazil to other countries. Brazil currently had the largest number of formally recognized Venezuelan refugees in the world. Refugees had free access to education, health and social assistance services and had been included in the \$38 billion exceptional cash transfer programme for low-income individuals undertaken in response to the public health emergency. It was alarming to see refugees returning home without any relevant improvements to conditions in their countries of origin, and the international community must not condone cases where returning refugees were stigmatized, sometimes at the instigation of their own Government.

6. **Ms. Dragan** (Canada) said that Canada had been working to resettle as many refugees as conditions allowed, including those identified by UNHCR as being in the most urgent need. The country would continue its strong support for the development of community sponsorship programmes and, as part of its ongoing commitment to complementary pathways, would admit 500 refugees over the next two years under its Economic Mobility Pathways Project. The Government had recently assumed the role of State lead in the global task force on third-country employment pathways currently being assembled. It had also launched the 2021–2025 Road Map for the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, and it called on all partners to increase efforts to mitigate the risk of gender-based violence and to ensure that humanitarian assistance responded to the needs and priorities of people in vulnerable situations, especially women and girls. Canada had also announced measures to grant permanent residency status to asylum claimants who had selflessly contributed to the country's health-care system during the crisis. It hoped that these and other selfless acts would help change the view of refugees from helpless dependents to individuals who actively contributed to the well-being of their new countries.

7. **Ms. Nagahara** (Japan) said that, in view of the increasing importance of technology and innovation in protection, UNHCR should use appropriate technologies to further increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations. Her Government appreciated the recognition that UNHCR gave to the different protection challenges that individuals faced due to factors such as age, gender and disability. Given the importance of ensuring educational opportunities for refugee youth, it had been implementing programmes to provide such opportunities for young Syrians since 2016 and Japanese universities provided opportunities to refugee youth through the Refugee Higher Education Program. As it was important to cooperate with a wide range of stakeholders to address the issue of internal displacement, Japan welcomed the commitment of UNHCR to supporting the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement as well as its efforts to enhance its preparedness by finalizing the Preparedness Package for IDP Emergencies and qualifying first responders for such emergencies. As the humanitarian-development nexus was a key tool for mitigating the burden on host countries, Japan also welcomed the work being done to strengthen partnerships between UNHCR and the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, regional development banks and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. As a member of the core group forming the Support Platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, Japan would seek to promote the nexus approach in finding solutions to the Afghan refugee situation.

8. **Ms. Moussa** (Egypt) said that Egypt hosted refugees and asylum seekers from 59 different countries. In Egypt, both refugees and persons in refugee-like situations had access to the labour market and were allowed to own property and engage in entrepreneurial activities. Refugee and migrant children from all Arabic-speaking countries had access to public education, and universities provided scholarships to thousands of students from conflict areas. All refugees, migrants and persons in refugee-like situations, regardless of nationality or status, had access to public health care, free vaccinations, treatment for tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis C, and measures taken as part of the Government's COVID-19 response, and all benefited from subsidies on basic goods, transportation and fuel. Her Government was concerned by the severe underfunding of UNHCR activities in Egypt and the region. Egypt would, however, continue to offer a home to all who sought refuge there.

9. **Ms. Shao Wu** (China) said that China called on all parties in Venezuela to resolve their internal issues through inclusive dialogue under the country's constitutional and

legislative frameworks. It also called on all countries concerned to remove unilateral sanctions on Venezuela and allow the people of Venezuela to overcome the pandemic.

10. **Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, in Iran, all refugees had access to adequate health-care services without discrimination and were fully included in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had had a severe impact on the country. Close to 500,000 Afghan children, many of them undocumented, were being educated in public primary and secondary schools.

11. According to the note on international protection, over 80 per cent of the world's refugee population lived in low- to middle-income countries. That indicated a deviation from the principle of fair and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. The declining rate of voluntary repatriation, which had decreased by 46 per cent from 2018 to 2019, represented a steady transformation in the international refugee protection system to the detriment of host communities. The alternative solution of resettlement was increasingly being treated as a discretionary favour and the number of refugees being resettled was declining steadily. The need for greater solidarity had yet to translate into action, and certain policies, specifically the imposition of unilateral sanctions, undermined it. The criminal sanctions imposed by the United States of America had a negative impact on refugees' access to such basic human rights as food and health and had narrowed the space for humanitarian work by politicizing humanitarian assistance. The international community should urge the United States of America to stop inflicting hardship on refugees through its unilateral sanctions on host countries.

12. **Mr. Modrusan** (Intersos) said that every State had the right to close its borders temporarily in order to limit the spread of COVID-19, provided that it continued to uphold the right to asylum. Although over 90 countries had continued to ensure that right during the pandemic, 72 countries had closed their borders to asylum seekers, thereby violating the principle of non-refoulement and the commitments that they had made under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) wished to urge all States to uphold their obligations under international law. They were particularly concerned about attempts to erode internationally recognized asylum procedures through the externalization of border controls, which could place asylum seekers at risk of physical and psychological harm. Certain legislative developments also gave cause for concern, such as the new asylum procedure introduced in Hungary that required potential asylum seekers to obtain prior permission to travel to the country if they wished to apply for asylum there. As that requirement might lead to violations of international law on refugees, Hungary was urged to bring its procedures back into line with international legal standards.

13. The European Commission's recently proposed New Pact on Migration and Asylum was also of concern as the proposed new system might lead to a reduction in the predictable sharing of responsibility, increased externalization of border controls and higher numbers of returned asylum seekers. NGOs called on European Union member States to work towards meaningful and predictable solidarity mechanisms. Despite the commitments made by States in 2017, the number of refugees being resettled had declined in recent years, to the extent that only around 12,000 persons had been resettled to date in 2020. NGOs commended those States that had relaunched their resettlement programmes during the pandemic and urged all States to work towards implementing the 2019–2021 three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways.

14. As the pandemic was placing a strain on national capacities, displaced populations were struggling to gain access to health services owing to high costs, administrative hurdles and restrictions on movement. Restrictions on access to reproductive health services, including antenatal care, were of particular concern. Levels of gender-based violence against women and girls had increased during the pandemic as victims were often confined to their homes with perpetrators. Reports indicated that an increasing number of women were engaging in sex work as a financial coping strategy. The pandemic had also resulted in children being exposed to higher rates of violence, early marriage, forced labour and malnutrition. Levels of social exclusion, stigmatization, discrimination, and xenophobia were on the rise, including for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons. Returnees were sometimes suspected of bringing the virus to their places of origin. Psychological trauma, stress and anxiety were increasing as a result of social isolation,

economic stress and misinformation, all of which fuelled mental illness, suicide and self-harm. Older persons and persons with disabilities were disproportionately affected by restrictive measures as they often found themselves isolated and cut off from services. Restrictions on access to legal aid made it difficult for persons of concern to obtain identity documents, which hindered their freedom of movement and access to services and exposed them to an increased risk of violence and abuse. Lack of documentation also undermined the right to housing, exposing many people to the risk of being exploited or evicted by landlords.

15. In order to ensure the continuity of their services, NGOs had made use of online platforms to manage individual cases and provide counselling and support. They had helped members of disadvantaged groups to earn an income from new areas of activity, such as the production of protective masks, and had used technology to monitor protective measures and gauge the various ways in which the pandemic and its consequences were affecting vulnerable persons.

16. Evidence suggested that cash transfers and vouchers were effective tools for ensuring child protection, tackling gender-based violence and protecting the right to housing, land and property. NGOs required additional funding to ensure that they could continue to protect vulnerable persons against the impact of the pandemic. For that reason, they urged donors to address both current and pre-existing funding shortfalls. They also called on States to develop more inclusive health plans and social protection schemes and to promote access to employment for displaced populations. When imposing counter-terrorism measures and sanctions, States should take steps to ensure that such measures did not have an unintended impact on their ability to provide humanitarian assistance.

17. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection), referring to the shocking rise in the number of reports of gender-based violence submitted by refugees and internally displaced persons since the start of the pandemic, said it was worth noting that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had recently signed off the first ever UNHCR policy on gender-based violence. Many members of the Executive Committee had expressed the view that social inclusion was essential to mitigating the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. It was therefore incumbent on States to ensure access to health care and employment, and that children were able to reach an age-appropriate level of educational attainment. Where the issue of inclusion was concerned, praise was due to Ecuador for its efforts to ensure that persons of concern had access to banking services. Internally displaced persons, of whom there were now around 46 million worldwide, constituted the largest group covered by the UNHCR mandate and, like refugees and stateless persons, they often had difficulty obtaining the documentation required to obtain access to local services.

18. Given the vital role that technology played in efforts to tackle the pandemic, it was hoped that countries would work together to develop and share technologies in order to maximize access to them. Many members had drawn attention to the importance of free legal services in enabling persons of concern to regularize their situation. It was interesting to note that Brazil had adopted a *prima facie* approach to the recognition of Venezuelan refugees, including children. Such an approach ensured that the settlement needs of refugees were met as quickly as possible. Gratitude was also due to Colombia for its generous use of residency and education permits to promote the inclusion of refugees.

19. **Ms. O'Hara** (Director of International Protection) said that it was heartening to note the extent to which refugees, displaced persons and stateless persons had risen to the challenge of assisting not only themselves but also the host communities in which they lived. In Canada, for instance, refugees played a significant role in the country's national health system. The Global Protection Cluster was an important mechanism for enabling humanitarian coordinators, United Nations country teams and government agencies to provide a fully inclusive response to the problems facing internally displaced persons. As such persons were citizens, Governments should include them in national development plans so that long-term solutions could be found to their settlement problems. Such an approach was in line with the objectives of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement and would benefit refugees and returnees as well as the internally displaced.

20. Where humanitarian responses were concerned, the Cluster Leadership Approach enabled UNHCR to work closely with the International Organization for Migration, the

United Nations Development Programme and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Although it was important for States to have strong national asylum systems, their global response to refugees should be characterized by responsibility, solidarity and burden-sharing and should include resettlement, greater investment in development and complementary pathways for admission to protection and solutions for refugees. However, an increased focus on resettlement and complementary pathways should not come at the expense of equitable access to asylum systems. UNHCR would make every effort to ensure that maximum use was made of technology in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in places where access to persons of concern was restricted by conflict or other factors. Technology could play a key role in enabling refugees, stateless persons and displaced persons to obtain information and assistance from UNHCR and other agencies.

21. **Mr. Baghaei Hamaneh** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that unilateral sanctions had a devastating impact on the countries on which they were imposed and on the refugees and displaced persons within their borders. It was essential for the international community, UNHCR and all concerned stakeholders to overcome their reservations and speak out against unilateral sanctions and their impact on the capacity of States to protect refugees.

(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight ([A/AC.96/1199](#), [A/AC.96/1201](#), [A/AC.96/1201/Add.1](#), [A/AC.96/1203](#), [A/AC.96/1206](#), [A/AC.96/1207](#) and [A/AC.96/1208](#))

22. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking via video link, said that as the world, UNHCR included, continued fighting the global fire that was COVID-19, efforts to transform the organization itself, which were a reflection of its commitment to greater agility, efficiency and integrity, had continued apace. For example, a new approach to programme planning and prioritization had been adopted that was designed to facilitate the delegation of authority to the field. As a result of the pandemic, most of the consultations with the regional bureaux on the new approach had had to be held online. In addition, the Budget Committee had been transformed into the Resource Planning and Management Board in a bid to bring operational and financial decision-making closer together. Updates to the resource allocation framework were planned for early 2021 and would take on board changes resulting from the results-based management system and the multi-year planning and budgeting process, including minor changes to UNHCR financial rules.

23. The new approach to planning was central to UNHCR efforts to maximize the results it delivered for those it served. Underpinning that approach was the conviction that results were achieved collectively, not by UNHCR alone. The pandemic had served to underscore the importance of partnerships, in particular with trusted local actors. More than half of the amounts that had been raised through the UNHCR COVID-19 appeal had been distributed to local responders. Partnership agreements had been made more flexible, and the partnership portal had been expanded to include other United Nations agencies. Survey results suggested that the moves to increase budget flexibility and improve relationships with partners were viewed positively.

24. Questions had been raised about the effect that the pandemic would have on efficiency at headquarters locations, where teleworking had become the rule almost overnight, and in the field, where access to persons of concern could be unpredictable. As of late September, teleworking arrangements were in place in 118 countries, and more than 10,000 members of staff were teleworking at least part of the time. A stoplight system – red, yellow, and green – had been devised to track work on critical tasks, and not one of the hundreds of tasks tracked was in the red.

25. The Business Innovations Group had been mandated to deliver on a number of proposals by ensuring that back-office operations were more efficient and effective. The Group's mandate had come to an end in June 2020, and its work had shed light on how UNHCR could proceed with its business transformation. It had shown, for example, that real efficiency gains could not be captured without making the necessary investments at the outset. Opportunities for additional savings were greatest at the global level, as there was considerable scope for reducing overlap at United Nations entities. Transformative projects,

however, required innovative approaches, and scaling up initiatives was part of a long-term engagement.

26. Promoting a culture of integrity and accountability was not a new priority for UNHCR. A review of how to embed a culture of positivity and proactivity within UNHCR was under way with the expectation that it would ultimately allow staff members to no longer feel defined simply by the need to comply with rules but also to be inspired to act with integrity. UNHCR was deeply committed to pushing the United Nations system forward in that area. As part of its leadership of a task force on sexual harassment, which had been set up by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, it had shepherded the development of a model policy on sexual harassment, a guide on preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the workplace and a code of conduct for United Nations events. Much had been learned in recent years about what would be required to ensure that workplace harassment was never tolerated, abusers were held accountable, victims received the support they needed and staff members were unafraid to speak out.

27. Planning for 2021 had been a lighter process than in previous years, a change that had allowed the new regional bureaux to focus on identifying priorities. The population of concern was expected to reach more than 93 million by late 2020, which was 8 per cent more than in 2019. The Syrian Arab Republic, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar accounted for around two thirds of refugee movements worldwide.

28. The budget for 2020 was more than \$9.1 billion and included two supplementary budgets totalling roughly \$463.7 million, one to finance pandemic-related activities and the other to respond to the ongoing crisis in the Sahel. The proposed budget for 2021 was just over \$8.6 billion. In 2019, the gap between needs and available funds had remained stable at 44 per cent. The shortfalls forced UNHCR to make difficult choices.

29. **Mr. González Mayagoitia** (Mexico) said that in most cases refugees afforded protection and other services within the framework of operations led by UNHCR had not tested positive for COVID-19 at higher rates than members of host communities. That outcome attested to the effectiveness of the UNHCR response to the pandemic. Shortfalls in the UNHCR budget nonetheless created uncertainty, and underscored the importance of securing flexible forms of funding and building strategic alliances with partner institutions, and private sector institutions in particular. The institutional reforms begun by the High Commissioner in 2016 had to be built on. Consolidating the progress that had been made towards decentralization and regionalization was particularly important, as was greater reliance on the results-based management system. The increase in the provision of in-kind assistance to refugees was not unjustified, but efforts to prevent fraud and corruption were also needed. Mexico welcomed the solid framework that UNHCR had developed in an attempt to prevent and respond to cases of sexual misconduct and the steps it was taking to promote a culture of inclusion within the organization itself.

30. **Ms. Nagahara** (Japan) said that the pandemic had raised the delicate question of how to strike a balance between public health and the right to seek asylum. Burden- and responsibility-sharing and the spirit of solidarity – the core themes of the global compact on refugees – nonetheless had to be kept in mind. The Japanese authorities encouraged UNHCR to continue using appropriate technologies, especially during the pandemic, to improve its operations.

31. Japan welcomed UNHCR efforts to make its cooperation with outside partners more robust. The number of forcibly displaced people, already at an unprecedented high, was likely to increase further in 2020 and the funding gap was thus likely to widen. UNHCR should therefore seek to expand its donor base, particularly through continued engagement with the private sector. In 2020, Japan had provided additional assistance to respond to unforeseen emergencies, and the information provided by UNHCR had enabled the Japanese authorities to make timely decisions on the provision of such assistance. UNHCR should follow up on the recommendations made by the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services so as to ensure that outstanding issues, including the reported mismanagement of donor funds in Uganda, were resolved. Japan supported the decision to adopt a results-based

management approach and wished to be kept informed of the impact of that and other institutional changes.

32. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) said that Israel would welcome regular updates from UNHCR on the steps it was taking to combat sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

33. **Mr. Yu** (Canada) said that the ability of UNHCR to respond rapidly to the pandemic had highlighted the importance of existing partnerships. Canada applauded recent UNHCR efforts to improve partnership arrangements, in particular with local NGOs that were active in the field and major international development actors, and encouraged enhanced coordination within the United Nations system. The pandemic had shown that greater efforts were needed to enable local NGOs to be equal partners. Making funding more widely available to such organizations heightened the effectiveness of their work. UNHCR should continue to act on recommendations made in the wake of audits. The drive to reform its internal systems would ultimately, it was hoped, lead to increased transparency, including with regard to budget priorities. Canada also encouraged UNHCR to continue prioritizing efforts to increase the diversity of its workforce.

34. **Mr. McNicholas** (United States of America) said that although the United States was proud to be the largest single donor, it was concerned that the top three donors still accounted for more than 60 per cent of all contributions to UNHCR. That situation posed a risk to the financial stability of the organization, which should endeavour to broaden and deepen its donor base. Existing and new donors should also do more. UNHCR should also ensure that its generally laudable efforts to cut administrative costs did not undermine burden-sharing goals or hamper its efforts to bolster accountability systems. The changes made to its financial rules were expected to lead to a number of improvements, not least to its ability to engage in medium- to longer-term strategies.

35. **Mr. Novikov** (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation supported the move to multi-year planning but expected UNHCR to conduct a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the changes it was making, including to its financial rules and budgeting practices. With regard to oversight, it was important to take due account of the recommendations of the external audit and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions related to accountability for reforms linked to decentralization and management. The reform process should be constantly reviewed and monitored and UNHCR should provide regular progress reports as well as a cost-benefit analysis. His Government welcomed the efforts made to implement the recommendations of the external audit, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Office of Internal Oversight Services related to the internal oversight system, in particular in the areas of purchasing and the strengthening of information technology potential.

36. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that his Government wished to thank UNHCR for sharing its financial statements and the report of the Board of Auditors for 2019 and for the helpful discussions held over the previous year during Standing Committee meetings and briefings. It had appreciated those opportunities for dialogue and information-sharing and looked forward to similar engagement in 2021. It acknowledged the continued significant efforts to improve internal management and administration, in particular the ongoing implementation of the Risk Management 2.0 initiative and the continued expansion of the number of risk-dedicated personnel. UNHCR should continue to enhance its risk management approach, and his Government welcomed its continued commitment to further improvements. The United Kingdom looked forward to the roll-out of the renewed results-based management approach over the following three years. The move to multi-year planning would lead to better reporting and decision-making and increased transparency, allowing UNHCR to take advantage of the multi-year core funding provided by the United Kingdom and pass on the benefits to others. The United Kingdom supported the decision to change the financial rules of UNHCR.

37. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking via video link, said that UNHCR had significantly increased its engagement with the private sector in 2020 and was on track to meet its goal of raising \$1 billion annually from the private sector by 2025. She hoped that around \$550 million of that yearly total would be unearmarked to allow for enhanced agility in responding to unforeseen circumstances. With regard to

decentralization and regionalization, UNHCR would provide formal impact reports on the costs and benefits and the progress made.

38. UNHCR had expanded its roster of operational and development partners in the private sector and academia, in the spirit of the global compact on refugees and the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing and with a view to delivering results more effectively and efficiently. It was on track to disburse the \$1.3 billion that it planned to make available to its partners in 2020. While that funding was not specifically earmarked for COVID-19, funds had been allocated for related activities in the area of health care that would enhance the ability of partners to respond to the pandemic. Around 19 per cent of the funds so far disbursed had been allocated to partners on the front lines of the COVID-19 response.

39. With regard to calls by the United States for greater responsibility-sharing and increased resource mobilization, she was pleased to state that the number of States in the top donor group had increased to 21. She appreciated the collaboration and support of the Russian Federation, particularly with regard to upcoming financial decisions, and agreed that the evaluation of internal reforms should be a continuous rather than one-off exercise.

Consideration of reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation

Report on activities of the Inspector General's Office (A/AC.96/1204)

40. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that, in the reporting period from July 2019 to June 2020, his Office's Investigation Service had been the subject of a periodic quality assurance peer review undertaken by investigation specialists from the United Nations Development Programme. The specialists had concluded that the Investigation Service was effective and had made various helpful recommendations, to which he had responded with an action plan endorsed by the High Commissioner. Where possible, the recommendations had already been implemented. The Office continued to strengthen its field presence so as to be closer to the persons it served and to address matters more responsively. A regional office had been established in Amman, Jordan, to serve as a digital and forensic hub through which to deliver the Office's "digital by default" approach.

41. In accordance with the UNHCR policy on independent oversight, his Office was responsible for coordinating the work of all independent oversight providers. In that role, it was currently conducting a review of the structure of the Strategic Oversight Service to help it to deliver on its mandate of consolidating, coordinating and contributing to independent oversight assurance work. As a non-executive, independent body, the Office's operations were reliant on partnerships. Thus, it continued to support the work of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, to liaise between the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system and UNHCR, and to facilitate the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. His Office also worked with departments across UNHCR on disciplinary matters, dispute resolution and witness protection, partner fraud and integrity issues, and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, to help deliver on the zero-tolerance policy.

42. The Office had not been immune to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While it had adapted well to the new restrictions imposed across the world and had implemented innovative approaches, some activities required physical intervention and, as a consequence, had had to be placed on hold until travel restrictions were lifted. A revised plan for the Office's activities in 2020, which included agile and innovative responses, had been agreed with the UNHCR management team. The Office had also developed an enhanced oversight response in relation to the increased fraud risks presented by the pandemic.

43. Demand on the Investigation Service remained high. The Service treated sexual misconduct cases with the highest priority, alongside financial and resettlement fraud. In the reporting period, the Office had received over 1,100 complaints of misconduct, which represented a 10 per cent decrease compared to the previous reporting period. However, that decrease was probably a result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of complaints was now returning to the levels seen in previous years. During the reporting period, the Office had substantiated 56 cases implicating UNHCR personnel and had referred those cases for disciplinary action. The High Commissioner had imposed disciplinary

measures on 28 UNHCR staff members, 18 of whom had been dismissed or separated. A review of the Office's case data to improve its understanding of the factors that affected its caseload had been commissioned. The Office also continued to help implementing partners to enhance their response capacity.

Report on evaluation (A/AC.96/1205)

44. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service), speaking via video link, said that, in 2018, the Evaluation Service had evaluated the UNHCR global fleet management strategy and had found that insufficient information was available on the number and location of UNHCR vehicles globally. However, the catalytic role of the evaluation had resulted in changes which ensured that UNHCR now knew exactly how many vehicles it had and where they were, and had also prompted the introduction of vehicle tracking systems to monitor mileage, fuel consumption and CO² emissions. UNHCR continued to build on best practices validated in the evaluation, such as auctioning, and was making innovations in other areas that were giving rise to a number of efficiencies and new partnerships.

45. Evaluation could also influence strategic priorities. In follow up to the global compact on refugees, the Service was taking a multi-year approach, examining the ways in which UNHCR was engaging with development actors and promoting burden-sharing and greater refugee self-reliance. It had found that UNHCR engagement with the World Bank and other international financial institutions had been significantly strengthened. However, it had also underlined a need to engage practically with development actors on the ground and had pointed up opportunities to build on formalized bilateral partnerships with other United Nations agencies through greater engagement with the United Nations development system.

46. Evaluations were key to improving responsiveness to changes in volatile humanitarian contexts. The Evaluation Service had moved quickly to support the UNHCR response to the pandemic, producing several rapid evidence-based reviews within the first three months that were helping UNHCR to adapt its operations to the new context. The Service planned to assess the UNHCR COVID-19 response as part of every evaluation it conducted in 2020 and 2021. Recognizing that UNHCR was a relatively small actor in the overall response to the pandemic compared to national Governments, the Service would also seek to evaluate UNHCR COVID-19 response operations in the context of broader assessments conducted by Governments and development partners.

47. The Service had recently evaluated four country operations with the view to influencing multi-year strategic planning. The findings of those evaluations suggested that, particularly in mixed situations involving refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons, demands were enormous, stretching UNHCR resources thin, particularly in underfunded areas such as UNHCR operations in Afghanistan. The findings also pointed up a need for UNHCR to clarify thematic boundaries around operations and to think more carefully about when to extend its programmatic work and when to link in with the efforts of others.

48. In 2021, the Service would evaluate five more country operations, focusing on the early results of decentralization. As part of that effort, in 2020 the Service had posted three senior evaluation staff to regional offices in the Americas, East and Horn of Africa, and West and Central Africa in order to be better able to respond to the planning, advocacy and decision-making needs of UNHCR management at regional and country levels and to reinforce the regional oversight system. Coordination with the Inspector General's Office and the internal audit system had significantly improved following the adoption of the policy on independent oversight at the end of 2019.

49. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) said that his delegation welcomed the information provided in relation to the investigation of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse but that it would appreciate clarification as to why fewer cases had been initiated in 2020, despite reports that a higher number of complaints had been made. Since the Inspector General's report mentioned that the number of cases of sexual harassment had decreased, he was surprised to find that the victims in approximately half of the 27 cases in which UNHCR staff were implicated had decided not to pursue a formal process following informal consultations with the Inspector General's Office, mostly because they did not want the persons accused to know that they had lodged a formal complaint and had decided to resolve the matter informally

through other mechanisms. His delegation would appreciate clarification regarding those cases, including a clear explanation of the role of the Inspector General's Office during informal consultations with victims. It would also be useful to know whether UNHCR followed up on informal agreements reached between victims and alleged perpetrators and took measures to protect victims who decided not to pursue formal complaints.

50. **Mr. Schröer** (Germany) said that the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee's warning that UNHCR must remain alert to the heightened risk of fraud during the COVID-19 pandemic was pertinent, since the pandemic had substantially increased protection risks. Innovative measures and procedures, particularly drawing on new digital solutions, were needed to mitigate the risk of fraud and corruption. The new UNHCR verification practices were to be commended, but further work was required to make them more reliable. His Government welcomed the close cooperation between UNHCR and financial service providers. However, since there was a general tendency during emergencies to collect more rather than less data, which was being exacerbated by the increased use of digital applications and communication channels, it strongly encouraged UNHCR to ensure the protection of beneficiaries' data and to share data responsibly.

51. His Government commended UNHCR for its commitment to enhancing risk management systems and strongly encouraged it to continue strengthening its complaints mechanisms to accommodate the rising number of allegations and prevent a backlog of cases. The Government also commended UNHCR for its decision to arrange an independent review of racial equality and equity in the workplace and to establish a global advisory group on inclusion and diversity, as well as its efforts to improve the quality and consistency of its evaluation products. It was interested to hear the results of the external quality review and assessment procedure for evaluation reports and looked forward to further exchanges. Of course, evaluations were not an end unto themselves; only the systematic and targeted dissemination of results and the implementation of recommendations would lead to an improvement in decision-making. His Government therefore appreciated the Evaluation Service's efforts to develop a dedicated communication strategy.

52. **Mr. McNicholas** (United States of America) said that the United States welcomed the progress made by UNHCR in the area of oversight and risk management and recognized the need for continued efforts to address integrity issues throughout the organization. The new policy under which all independent oversight functions had been incorporated into a single framework had allowed for greater coordination among the relevant entities. The United States urged UNHCR to measure the progress of its decentralization and regionalization efforts against specific targets and to adjust its model where necessary.

53. The United States was pleased to see UNHCR taking stronger measures to mitigate fraud and corruption, but it must continue to address the systemic vulnerabilities that had been highlighted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The United States noted the organization's work to increase the investigation capacity of its implementing partners in order to better address sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. In view of the recent allegations made in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United States called on all United Nations agencies to urgently ensure that all such violations were prevented in the first place and addressed when identified. It welcomed the leadership shown by UNHCR in that area and its focus on a survivor-centred approach.

54. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the United Kingdom applauded the continued efforts of UNHCR to improve its approach to integrity matters. It welcomed the establishment of an Investigation Service office in Jordan and the high level of compliance in management implication reporting. It hoped that the discussions on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment would continue, especially in view of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic; in particular, it wondered how UNHCR planned to address cases where victims did not wish to pursue a complaint. It would also like to hear more about how UNHCR used lessons learned and evidence in its decision-making.

55. **Ms. Zondag** (Netherlands), speaking via video link, said that the Netherlands welcomed the substantive work undertaken by the Inspector General's Office during the reporting period and its cooperation with the Joint Inspection Unit, as well as the

development of standard operating procedures on a victim-centred approach. It would appreciate more information on the budgetary constraints that had prevented follow-up on some of the recommendations made in the United Nations Development Programme peer review report. In that connection, it encouraged UNHCR to ensure that the Office received sufficient funding.

56. The Netherlands was pleased that the Inspector General's Office had increased its field and regional presence and welcomed the plans to conduct two proactive fraud reviews. However, it noted with concern that several activities had been deprioritized due to resource constraints, including those aimed at strengthening the investigation capacity of implementing partners. It wondered how UNHCR planned to address that concern, especially as the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee had reported a disproportionate increase in complaints against implementing partners. It called on UNHCR to increase the capacity of the Office to conclude all investigations speedily and within the set time frame. It also encouraged UNHCR and its sister agencies to review the possibility of a joint approach to address capacity concerns.

57. The Netherlands welcomed the efforts to increase the scope and capacity of the Evaluation Service, as well as the expansion of the Service to regional level. It stressed the need for the Service to have structural, functional and budgetary independence and encouraged UNHCR to ensure that the outcomes of evaluations were included in results-based management planning.

58. **Mr. Garnett** (Inspector General) said that his Office had opened fewer investigations into complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse compared to the previous reporting period because a higher proportion of the complaints made had concerned implementing partners. In such cases, partners were encouraged to carry out the investigation themselves, provided they had the capacity to do so. Victims of sexual harassment were informed about the victim-centred approach to investigations and were given control over how their case was handled. Some victims who did not initially wish to pursue a complaint ended up changing their mind. His Office worked with other departments, such as the Ethics Office, in order to ensure that victims who did not wish to pursue a complaint nonetheless received proper support. In collaboration with the Deputy High Commissioner, his Office was looking at the balance of resources across the organization and reflecting on ways to solve problems before they became misconduct issues, for example through mediation. Although it had deprioritized its work to strengthen the investigation capacities of implementing partners, it was developing its e-learning resources and aimed to map its roles and responsibilities to its partners more clearly. UNHCR as a whole was drawing on lessons learned and trying to address issues up front in order to prevent their reoccurrence.

59. **Ms. Bell** (Head of the Evaluation Service), speaking via video link, said that the creation of regional evaluation posts would achieve a number of things; for example, it would enable the Evaluation Service to assess how the decentralization and regionalization process was affecting the organization's performance. Given that several other United Nations agencies were taking similar steps, it would be interesting to look at how United Nations system assets at the regional level could be combined in order to strengthen system delivery.

60. The peer review that was to be conducted in early 2021 would involve a member State representative and would give the State in question an insight into the work of the Evaluation Service. UNHCR was committed to ensuring that the Service remained independent, as demonstrated by the fact that she had recently been appointed from outside the organization. The new practice of evaluating the work of UNHCR in individual countries would help UNHCR to identify good practices and to focus its work in the context of multi-year planning.

61. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees), speaking via video link, said that UNHCR intended to ensure that the decentralization and regionalization process was cost neutral. She could provide several examples of the ways in which the organization had used the outcomes of evaluations in its decision-making. The evaluation of data use carried out the previous year had informed its data strategy and had led to the creation of a global data service. Important steps were being taken based on the recent evaluation of UNHCR engagement with the private sector, particularly with respect to

shared value partnerships without a financial component. Lastly, the evaluation of livelihood strategies and approaches had fed into the work on the global compact on refugees.

Consideration and adoption of the biennial programme budget 2020–2021 (revised)
(A/AC.96/1202 and A/AC.96/1202/Add.1)

Draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters
(A/AC.96/1202, annex VI)

62. **Ms. Keah** (Rapporteur), speaking via video link, 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 2020, for the amount of \$9,131,348,405. Paragraph (b) of the draft decision contained a proposal to approve the programmes and budgets for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters for 2021, for the amount of \$8,615,834,612; that amount was unchanged as compared to the original amount approved during the seventieth session of the Executive Committee. The draft decision authorized the High Commissioner to create supplementary budgets and issue special appeals in case of additional emergency needs. Paragraph (e) of the draft decision requested the High Commissioner to respond flexibly and efficiently to the needs indicated under the revised biennial programme budget for 2020–2021 and encouraged his Office to be as efficient and effective as possible with the funds provided. At the informal preparatory consultations held on 21 September 2020, member States had agreed to add the words "in implementing his mandate, including for durable solutions" to paragraph (e) of the draft decision contained in document A/AC.96/1202. It was the amended decision that was now proposed for adoption.

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

64. *It was so decided.*

Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations

65. **Mr. Elie** (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) said that the consultation process had begun with a series of weekly online meetings between UNHCR and NGOs on the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. It had culminated in three days of consultations during the previous week on the topic of responding to pandemics. Those consultations had covered the same themes as the upcoming High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges.

66. The consultations had brought together around 50 UNHCR staff members and 200 representatives of around 117 NGOs, including refugee-led organizations. The aim was to further strengthen partnerships and to discuss not only challenges resulting from the pandemic but also emerging opportunities and innovative approaches. In order to stay and deliver during the pandemic, humanitarian workers had had to adapt to unprecedented constraints, while facing the possibility of a long-term funding crisis. The pandemic had shown the value of working with organizations led by refugees and internally displaced persons; such organizations needed to be better recognized, better resourced and included in principled partnerships and coordination structures.

67. The session on resilience and inclusion had focused on how UNHCR-NGO partnerships could help to step up livelihood activities and advocate for inclusive environments. Cash programmes were an example of good practice in adapting to challenges, and multi-stakeholder collaboration and long-term planning through scalable initiatives, such as the Refugee Self-Reliance Initiative, had also been identified as crucial. Together, humanitarians, Governments, development actors and the private sector could support refugee businesses, improve refugee skills recognition and boost the capacity of national services in refugee hosting areas.

68. The critical role of communities had also been underscored during the discussion on protection considerations. As trusted first responders, community-based organizations ensured that refugees had access to food and basic services. During the pandemic, they had

distributed masks, assisted with distance learning and facilitated protection services, including in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. UNHCR had provided remote support to such organizations, but, in the future, community-based protection with a strong age, gender and diversity perspective should be better supported, in a manner that complemented other efforts and avoided transferring risks to communities.

69. Opportunities for enhanced UNHCR-NGO partnership on climate action – especially in terms of resilience and preparedness – had also been discussed, focusing on preliminary lessons to be drawn from the pandemic. In that domain too, communities played a critical role, and the inclusion of affected families and gender issues in planning and decision and policymaking was widely valued. There had been consensus on the need to green humanitarian interventions and advocate for the adoption of climate-positive responses to recover from the pandemic. Long-term investments, together with multi-year, multi-stakeholder partnerships, should develop alongside the roll-out of the UNHCR climate action framework.

70. Overall, the UNHCR-NGO partnership continued to improve, and NGOs welcomed the sustained UNHCR efforts to simplify and harmonize partnership procedures, including with refugee-led organizations, through cost-effective reforms that increased accountability.

71. The discussions had led to a set of recommendations for member States, who were called on to follow up on the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in order to promote resilience and inclusion, including through refugee skills recognition; to strengthen protection capacities, particularly at the community level; to engage with the Clean Energy Challenge through multi-year flexible funding for livelihoods and economic inclusion programmes; and to invest in climate change adaptation and preparedness in order to minimize displacement. The full set of recommendations would soon be available on the web page of the High Commissioner’s Dialogue. He hoped that they would be reflected in member State policies and in the conclusions of the Executive Committee, particularly with regard to international protection in the context of a health emergency and to mental health and psychosocial support.

72. **Ms. Keah** (Rapporteur), speaking via video link, said that the global compact on refugees cemented the partnership between UNHCR and NGOs and recognized the important work of NGOs for refugees and host States and communities. She was pleased that the annual UNHCR-NGO consultations had been able to take place amid the pandemic, especially given the chosen theme of “responding to pandemics”, which was due for an Executive Committee conclusion in 2021 and also dovetailed nicely with the High Commissioner’s Dialogue. NGOs, especially at the local level, had been instrumental in the response to the pandemic and had been involved in developing the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19. Accordingly, their insights would undoubtedly be useful in discussions of the first topic of the multi-year workplan and in those on mental health and psychosocial support due to take place in 2022.

73. The linkage between the High Commissioner’s Dialogue, the annual UNHCR-NGO consultations and the Executive Committee’s deliberations was imperative in creating synergies for the advancement of international protection and the search for durable solutions. The idea of NGO consultations taking place at the regional level in the coming years would provide a useful platform to further contribute to the effectiveness and efficacy of the organization’s decentralization. It was in the interest of the millions of persons of concern that UNHCR and NGOs maintained a robust partnership that placed at the centre of its engagement the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

74. **Mr. McNicholas** (United States of America) said that the United States commended UNHCR for extending and improving its partnerships, including with local and refugee-led NGOs, and for continuing to implement Grand Bargain commitments that had a direct impact on NGOs, including addressing cost classification and coverage, improving mechanisms for accountability to affected populations and increasing localization. It recognized the role of UNHCR in advancing economic empowerment and inclusion for refugees. In the aftermath of the pandemic, ensuring that refugees’ economic participation was governed by policies that promoted fairness and inclusion would improve the economic well-being and recovery

of refugees and host communities alike. UNHCR led on proactively preventing and addressing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, in part by building the investigation capacity of NGOs so that the whole system was better equipped to address allegations in a victim-centred manner.

75. The annual partnership survey had proven to be an excellent tracking and accountability tool. While the overall relationship between UNHCR and NGO partners continued to improve, the 2019 survey had pointed up a number of areas requiring greater attention, including improved use of multi-year partnership agreements, timely signing of project partnership agreements and consistent implementation of policy and practice across regions and operations. The United States welcomed the initiative of regional bureaux to lead multi-stakeholder consultations involving NGOs and wished to stress that, as UNHCR adopted new approaches and streamlined operations, it was essential to apply the principles of partnership faithfully with NGOs.

Other statements

76. **Mr. Avognon** (Chair of UNHCR Staff Council) said that, while UNHCR was used to operating in challenging environments, never before had it had to contend with a worldwide lockdown. He hailed the resilience of staff who had stayed and delivered in some of the remotest areas of the world, with little or no access to health care or possibilities of medical evacuation in some locations, sometimes at the expense of their physical and mental health and with no possibility to visit their loved ones for months. Sadly, some had lost their lives to the coronavirus, and he took the opportunity to honour their memory.

77. As the pandemic was expected to last for the foreseeable future, there were lessons to be learned in anticipation of a return to total or partial lockdowns. One of those lessons was the need for UNHCR to strike a balance between the overall interests of the organization and the welfare of its personnel. Staff had complained about what they perceived as the bureaucracy surrounding the instruction to stay and deliver, with some decisions on individual situations being taken thousands of kilometres from the point of delivery, with little knowledge of local circumstances. The matter had been amply discussed with management and, if the situation arose again, it was the Staff Council's hope that managers would be more mindful of the needs of their staff and remain as flexible as possible to avoid burnout. It was also necessary to avoid the rules being interpreted and applied differently from one region to another.

78. In addition to the repercussions of the pandemic, there were new threats looming on the horizon as a result of ongoing discussions on the future of work in the United Nations and the gradual introduction of increasingly precarious forms of employment. There was growing anxiety among staff that such changes were likely to lead to the so-called "uberization" of jobs in the United Nations and the creation of a two-tier staffing structure, with different remuneration scales. As jobs were on the line, it would be key for staff to be represented at the discussion table. Moreover, the Staff Council wished to draw management's attention to the risk of regionalization creating closed staffing circuits, or regional enclaves, where staff would rotate only within a certain geographical region, with little diversity and cross-fertilization among regions. It was hopeful that every effort would be made to ensure that diversity was preserved in the organization, including at headquarters and in regional bureau structures.

79. The outrage caused by the killing of George Floyd had been a powerful trigger for challenging the organization on issues related to discrimination and racism within its ranks. Not only was the Staff Council pleased to see many colleagues spearheading reflections on diversity, it was equally encouraged that the High Commissioner had undertaken to examine the issue through a soon-to-be established advisory group on inclusion and diversity.

80. As a consequence of regionalization, the Staff Council was in the process of modifying its statutes to establish regional staff associations in the coming months and was counting on management's help in that endeavour. In addition, it would be engaging with management to revisit the terms of time release for staff representation activities, both in the field and at headquarters. It was important that staff released on a full-time basis for such activities were able to return safely to mainstream functions without having to search for a

post for years. Addressing that issue was important to avoid deterring staff from volunteering for that indispensable task and, ultimately, to improve staff morale and the organization's overall performance.

81. **Mr. McNicholas** (United States of America) said that successful fulfilment of the UNHCR mandate depended on the quality and commitment of each individual in its workforce and that there was, therefore, a responsibility to ensure that every staff member had access to appropriate support and was held to the highest standards of accountability. The United States recognized the exceptional commitment and sacrifice of UNHCR staff who had stayed and delivered in complex and challenging environments and expressed its sincere condolences to staff and families affected by the pandemic. It also recognized the toll that transformation could take on staff morale and encouraged UNHCR to keep up its communication at all levels and with appropriate feedback mechanisms. The United States was hopeful that the changes would result in a stronger organization, better prepared for the future, while simultaneously ensuring that staff welfare was addressed throughout. It would continue to monitor and support progress in achieving gender parity, diversity and inclusion, and to stand alongside UNHCR staff in support of their work around the world.

82. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it had been an extraordinary few months, and that UNHCR had had to work very collaboratively to implement, nearly overnight, the shift to teleworking, including in field locations. Many of the decisions had needed to be taken as a system, which was perhaps why some measures might appear bureaucratic or not as flexible as some might have liked. Much was being said about the instruction to stay and deliver, but it was much more than that: it was a duty to serve, and management would make every effort to support staff in their dedication to the UNHCR mandate. Concerning the future of work, during the previous week the High-Level Committee on Management had considered and endorsed a provisional plan and certain directions proposed by the Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce and had reconfirmed to the representatives of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations that management intended to lead a fully inclusive process.

83. **The Chair** said that the Executive Committee applauded the outstanding courage and dedication shown by staff during the pandemic and counted on the Staff Council to keep it informed of developments affecting their well-being.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.