



# General Assembly

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

### Summary record of the 742nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 7 October 2021, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Baddoura (Vice-Chair).....(Lebanon)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**General debate** (*continued*)

*Statements made in exercise of the right of reply*

1. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Azerbaijan) said that Azerbaijan felt obliged to exercise the right of reply in respect of the fabricated and groundless statement made by the representative of Armenia at the Executive Committee's 737th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.737](#)). Following its victory over the aggressor in 2020, Azerbaijan had been working to restore territorial integrity and ensure the safe and dignified return of more than 650,000 internally displaced persons. It had given its consent for a mission of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) within the framework of the November 2020 trilateral statement and agreed with the UNHCR objectives. Unfortunately, Armenia had been obstructing the implementation of the mission, hypocritically trying to lay the responsibility with Azerbaijan and disseminating messages of hatred against Azerbaijan in international forums. Azerbaijan, however, believed that there was no alternative to advancing the values of peace, tolerance and diversity. With large-scale destruction, minefields and housing problems posing major obstacles to return, Azerbaijan was calling on the United Nations, its specialized agencies and other United Nations entities and international partners to support demining, rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration efforts in the liberated territories. After years of suffering, the region deserved a better future, free from conflict and dividing lines, and, for that to come about, work on border delimitation and demarcation and a peace treaty based on mutual acceptance of territorial integrity, sovereignty and internationally recognized borders were urgently needed.

2. **Mr. Ambrazevich** (Belarus), referring to the statements made by the representatives of Poland and Lithuania at the Executive Committee's 740th and 741st meetings ([A/AC.96/SR.741](#) and [A/AC.96/SR.740](#)), respectively, to the effect that Belarus was using refugees as political instruments, said that his Government would like to express its full support for the position set out by the High Commissioner, who had emphasized that refugees and migrants should never be used for political ends and should always be afforded access to humanitarian aid. It refuted the unfounded claims that it had a policy of encouraging illegal migration towards neighbouring countries for political purposes. While it indeed had witnessed an increase in flows of migrants through the country, the question as to why that was occurring should be addressed not to Belarus but rather the countries that had unleashed war and conflict in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and parts of Eurasia, which had brought about massive forced displacement. Furthermore, not one of the persons in an irregular situation passing through the country was seeking refuge in Belarus; they all sought asylum in countries of the European Union. Noting that the High Commissioner had drawn attention to the need to resolve the political tensions between countries that such flows had caused, he pointed out that it was the European Union that had ceased cooperation on migration, not Belarus, which had in fact been calling for renewed cooperation since April and stood ready to work jointly with its European Union neighbours.

3. **Mr. Soualem** (Algeria), referring to the statement made by the representative of Morocco at the Executive Committee's 740th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.740](#)), said that Morocco had evoked a human tragedy of its own making. It had denounced the solidarity of donors and the generosity of Algeria, as the host country, and had accused implementing partners and other stakeholders on the ground of turning a blind eye to or even complicity in irregularities. The pernicious propaganda, which Morocco had been spinning for years, was so appalling that the European Commission, the World Food Programme and other international bodies had felt compelled to speak out. Those who questioned the UNHCR mandate and the probity and commitment of its staff weakened its protection mandate, threw suspicion on countries of asylum and stigmatized generous donors. That fruitless and immoral approach showed no empathy for the vulnerable people affected and the misinformation and fake news diverted attention from the reality on the ground. Morocco appeared intent on whipping up hatred and throwing oil on the fire, instead of asking itself who was responsible for that long-standing refugee problem and why it had continued for so long. The September 2020 decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union provided yet another reason for a serious examination of conscience on its part.

4. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), referring to the statements made by the representatives of Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador and Chile at the Executive Committee's 738th, 740th and 741st meetings ([A/AC.96/SR.738](#), [A/AC.96/SR.740](#) and [A/AC.96/SR.741](#)), respectively, said Venezuela regretted that certain States insisted on using the plight of refugees as a pretext to discredit the Government of Nicolás Maduro. They had shamelessly requested financial resources to address a situation of human displacement attributable entirely to the illegal coercive measures imposed on Venezuela with the complicity of other Latin American countries. The Government of Colombia claimed to be seeking resources to protect children born in Colombia of Venezuelan parents who were at risk of statelessness, yet all children of Venezuelan parents were entitled to Venezuelan nationality under the Constitution, irrespective of where they were born. Brazil and Ecuador had spoken of a multidimensional or hybrid crisis in Venezuela, but there was no legal or technical substance to their observations, which were no more than value judgments expressed for media purposes. The four hundred coercive measures that were sabotaging the humanistic plans of the Government of Venezuela constituted a crime against humanity. Venezuela also deplored the violence, persecution, xenophobia and discrimination that its nationals were facing, particularly in Chile – notably during the recent protest in Iquique, which neither the competent authorities nor UNHCR had expressly condemned despite the barbarity of the grotesque events witnessed. Venezuela was urging its nationals to return voluntarily to their homeland, where they would be safe. Venezuela called on all countries to follow the path of solidarity and peace and was convinced that progress towards improving the situation of refugees worldwide could be achieved without politicization.

5. **Mr. Jaakik** (Morocco), referring to the remarks made by the representative of Algeria in exercise of the right to reply, said that Morocco wished to refute the ill-intentioned false accusations made by Algeria, which continued to systematically politicize international forums. It was clear that the Algerian regime continued to finance and devolve responsibilities to separatist movements. The Tindouf camps were under the strict control of armed militia, their inhabitants abandoned in precarious conditions without decent housing, basic resources or medical treatment. The decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union had no international legal standing and had been rejected as politically motivated by international bodies. Moreover, Algeria had consistently declined to implement resolutions of the European Parliament, including a recent resolution denouncing grave human rights violations in its territory. References to imaginary military clashes, such as those made during the 739th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.739](#)), were pure propaganda, intended to divert attention from the responsibilities that Algeria bore under international humanitarian law. Furthermore, United Nations agencies had attested to the stability of conditions in Morocco, had reported no violent activities and had never referred to the situation in the Sahara as an occupation. In concluding, Morocco wished to remind the Executive Committee of its exemplary policies on asylum and migration.

6. **Ms. Kołodyńska** (Poland), referring to the remarks made by the representative of Belarus in exercise of the right of reply, said that, although deeply concerned and disappointed to have been forced to address the issue in the impartial and apolitical forum of the UNHCR Executive Committee, Poland wished to reiterate that there was enough evidence to describe the situation at the border between the European Union and Belarus as a hybrid attack in which irregular migration was being used to exert pressure and achieve political goals. Poland stood in solidarity against the Belarusian regime with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the entire European Union and supported the decision to impose sanctions taken in June 2021. It remained determined to protect the external borders of the European Union and prevent abuse of its asylum system. With regard to humanitarian issues, it was important to note that Belarus had consistently refused aid from Poland despite repeated requests for access to provide migrants in Belarusian territory with food, water, clothing and appropriate medical care. Poland therefore took the opportunity to call on Belarus to assume full responsibility, in accordance with its international obligations, for migrants in its territory whose arrival it had itself orchestrated.

7. **Mr. Petrossian** (Armenia), referring to the statement made by the representative of Azerbaijan at the Executive Committee's 738th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.738](#)), said that, heeding the High Commissioner's call to avoid politicization, Armenia would exercise the

utmost restraint in responding to the numerous allegations made by Azerbaijan, whose attempts to glorify war were utterly unacceptable. Armenia was deeply disappointed that Azerbaijan had used the humanitarian platform provided by the Executive Committee as an opportunity to deny the very existence of Nagorno-Karabakh and its people. That denial appeared to be part of a consistent attempt to revise and wriggle out of the agreements set out in the November 2020 trilateral statement, which contained a mandate for UNHCR to work in Nagorno-Karabakh and a number of further references to Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan appeared to think that it could cherry-pick from international law and United Nations Security Council resolutions the provisions that best suited its interests. Armenia reiterated its readiness to resume the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process under the aegis of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. That process should address all issues related to the resolution of the conflict, including the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Armenians to all parts Nagorno-Karabakh, including those temporarily occupied by Azerbaijan.

8. **Mr. Akzhigitov** (Russian Federation), referring to the statement made by the representative of Georgia at the Executive Committee's 741st meeting (A/AC.96/SR.741), said that Georgia had made unfounded, politicized attacks on the Russian Federation that contributed nothing to the constructive discussion of humanitarian issues. Georgia appeared to be attempting to shift responsibility for the situation onto others and to justify its decision not to take steps to resolve it. The Russian Federation would like to stress once again that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were independent States and that the statements concerning the so-called occupied Georgian territories were therefore without foundation. Georgia had driven the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia who had proclaimed independence away and its aggressive policy towards them was the true reason for forced migration in the region.

9. **Ms. Arango Olmos** (Colombia) said that Colombia was dealing with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis because of the mass movement of 5.6 million Venezuelans, who had been forced to flee their country because they lacked access to basic rights, including food, education and health care and, according to a 2021 survey, 94.5 per cent of the population lived in poverty. Colombia had welcomed 31 per cent of the migrants, most of whom had fled on foot, carrying children and only limited possessions, to seek international protection. Colombia endeavoured to avoid politicization and would not refer to the causes of that mass exodus, but it felt compelled to note that Venezuela persisted in placing the blame on external factors. Colombia and its neighbours in the region would continue to show solidarity with a vulnerable population whose fundamental rights had been violated for years and was doing its utmost to combat xenophobia, which was a challenge faced by host communities throughout the world. In many cases, those communities were also vulnerable, especially in the context of the pandemic. An approach that went beyond humanitarian assistance and involved host communities in long-term development projects was therefore needed. Colombia would continue to support the work done by UNHCR in the region, complying with its mandate in total transparency.

10. **Ms. Quezada** (Chile), referring to remarks made by the representative of Venezuela in relation to the recent protest in Iquique, said that the Government of Chile deeply regretted the events, which had been categorically condemned by its authorities. It was working with relevant organizations, including UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to find a solution that took the needs of both migrants and host communities into account. It was important to note that most host communities did not share the views and attitudes that had sparked the violence seen in Iquique; Chile remained focused on providing a humanitarian response to the unprecedented and extremely complex crisis and called for a constructive spirit to prevail.

11. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia), referring to the remarks made by the representative of the Russian Federation in exercise of the right of reply, said that Russia continued to occupy 20 per cent of the sovereign territory of Georgia. In January 2021, the European Court of Human Rights had confirmed that the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia were an integral part of Georgian territory occupied by Russia and had ruled that, since it exercised effective control in those regions, Russia was responsible for major human rights violations against the Georgian people. Georgia reiterated that, as the occupying power, Russia bore full responsibility for the situation in the occupied territories.

12. **Mr. Soualem** (Algeria) said that Morocco was responsible for the illegal occupation of a territory that was not recognized by international bodies and guilty of inflicting suffering on people who had been forced into exile for more than four decades. It remained extremely light-handed in the face of that human drama, shamelessly attempting to manipulate forums in Geneva and elsewhere with total disregard for humanitarian values. Algeria invited Morocco to review its understanding of decolonization, to show maturity and to assume the responsibilities that history placed on its shoulders.

13. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, while he would refrain from referring to the situation in Colombia and its more than six decades of internal conflict, enforced disappearance and poverty, he wished to note that it was an act of total cynicism for a country that was supporting the imposition of unilateral coercive measures that were illegal under the Charter of the United Nations and were the structural cause of the migration flows from Venezuela to be raising concerns about those flows and requesting resources to address them, especially when the final destination of those resources was unknown.

14. **Ms. Arango Olmos** (Colombia) said that she wished to recall that all resources received by UNHCR and other United Nations entities in Colombia and other countries of the region were subject to all necessary donor audits and formalities. Colombia would continue to work with UNHCR and IOM to support and provide assistance to its Venezuelan brothers and sisters in solidarity and fraternity.

15. **The Chair**, thanking participants for their contributions to the rich discussion, said that their comments and questions would provide UNHCR with much to consider. In 2020, the common message had been that no one was safe until everyone was safe; building on that theme, in 2021, many had voiced concern about growing socioeconomic disparities, including the unequal distribution of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccinations. The increasing number of calls for equality, inclusion and burden and responsibility sharing were encouraging signs that change was possible and, as the High Commissioner himself had stated, if all stakeholders worked together, with courage and humility and in a true spirit of solidarity, they could succeed in improving the situation of displaced and stateless persons throughout the world.

### Consideration of reports on the work of the Standing Committee

(a) **International protection** ([A/AC.96/1210](#), [A/AC.96/1211](#), [A/AC.96/1217](#) and [A/AC.96/1219](#))

16. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that the overwhelming support for the principles of the global compact on refugees expressed during the general debate indicated that it had survived the COVID-19 pandemic and represented a viable strategy for the future. Despite almost universal acceptance of laws on the protection of refugees, however, repeated violations of those laws undermined the global asylum regime. In the past year, 195 countries had fully or partially closed their borders on health grounds, with 64 States making no exceptions for asylum seekers. Xenophobia and hatred had prompted attacks on refugee camps and humanitarian workers. Violence and persecution had been reported in 39 countries and there was compelling evidence of pushbacks at land and sea borders. UNHCR joined in the condemnation of the worrying practice of instrumentalization of those seeking protection.

17. Loss of life at sea, the reduction of search-and-rescue capacities, denial of disembarkation of those rescued and the increased use of arbitrary detention as a deterrent were justified on the grounds of national security and the COVID-19 pandemic response. Protection needs had multiplied due to the impact of the pandemic on displaced persons and the spike in gender-based violence experienced during lockdowns. Many gains in gender equality and the rights of women and girls had been reversed; there had been a rise in sexual exploitation and abuse, and girls' schooling had been interrupted, in some cases indefinitely. Over 12 million persons with disabilities were among those forcibly displaced worldwide, and they had suffered increased discrimination during the pandemic. UNHCR was committed to mainstreaming age, gender and diversity in all its programmes. The disparity in global vaccination rates rendered the notion of responsibility sharing, for some, meaningless.

18. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees remained vital and had saved millions of lives over the previous 70 years. Its enduring relevance was ensured by its interpretation by national and international courts as a living instrument, and the development of jurisprudence to meet contemporary protection needs. In total, 149 States were parties to the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol, or both, and State practice demonstrated the global consensus that the right to claim asylum and the prohibition of refoulement were binding on all nations as customary law.

19. Resettlement levels were at their lowest in 20 years but were expected to show a rise as the pandemic subsided; the 2022 resettlement target announced by the United States of America was particularly encouraging and should inspire other countries to increase the number of resettlement places. Although most refugees wished to return home, when root causes were ignored and conflicts continued, repatriation was just a dream. Only 250,000 refugees had been able to safely return to their country of origin in 2020 and the millions displaced within their own countries also found return impossible when violence continued.

20. In that context, other solutions were needed. One solution was the self-sufficiency and inclusion of refugees in the social safety nets of host countries, including non-discriminatory access to health care, accommodation, education and livelihoods. Displaced persons who were able to work could contribute meaningfully to their host communities. Examples of that approach included: the leadership shown by the Government of Colombia in providing temporary protection status to 1.7 million Venezuelans and a pathway to citizenship; the protection provided by many countries over years or even decades; the provision of primary education to displaced children; and the development of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility.

21. A second solution was increased support for the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. UNHCR was therefore working closely with development actors, the private sector, international financial institutions and peace actors to support host countries and countries of origin. UNHCR was increasing support for Afghan refugees and displaced persons within Afghanistan.

22. A third solution lay in the development of complementary pathways, through increased access to labour markets, recognition of professional and other qualifications, and community sponsorship. A UNHCR pilot project with private sponsors supported the integration of refugees and university corridors were being established to further increase the percentage of displaced young people with access to tertiary education.

23. The increase in mixed movements, with their wide range of migration drivers, posed serious challenges to the identification of refugees. In some cases, migrants had to apply for asylum in a transit country in order to gain legal status and travel documents, which overburdened national asylum systems.

24. Accusations had been made that judicial procedures were abused in order to avoid deportation. Government officials complained of the difficulties of executing legally sanctioned returns to countries of origin. UNHCR took seriously the concerns expressed about the integrity of the asylum system. Technical support was provided to front-line and host countries to develop processes for identifying persons in need of protection; a fast, fair system with a right to appeal to an independent court could be more effective in identifying those who could return home in safety. UNHCR needed to work with Governments to improve conditions for voluntary returns and remove impediments to return for those not in need of international protection.

25. Attempts by wealthy nations to deny access to asylum by outsourcing their responsibilities to countries with more limited capacities were one of the most troubling challenges to the international asylum system. She urged all nations to meet their obligations to facilitate access to their territory by asylum seekers, grant international protection to those in need of it and avoid any risk of refoulement. While States had the sovereign right to manage their border and guard against health, security and criminal threats, they must also respect refugee law, including the right to seek asylum, the prohibition of refoulement and the obligation not to penalize asylum seekers who entered a country without authorization.

26. The protection of vulnerable members of the LGBTIQ+ community posed a serious challenge since persons with a particular sexual orientation could be denied their rights to access health services and were especially vulnerable to violence and persecution. The global round table held in June 2021 by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity had resulted in a commitment to better protect the rights of displaced persons from the LGBTIQ+ community.

27. Once the COVID-19 pandemic had receded, the scale on which climate change was forcing displacement would be made clear; indeed, the Secretary-General had warned that the effects of climate change threatened human existence. Climate change was a risk multiplier that exacerbated inequalities and community tensions, leading to violence, conflict and persecution, and the need to seek protection across borders and displacement within States. UNHCR was responding to displacement prompted in part by climate change and natural disasters through legal analysis, strengthened preparedness and enhanced resilience, and by reducing the environmental footprint of the Office and that of refugee settlements.

28. The risk of statelessness remained a root cause of displacement and violence; the historical denial of citizenship to the Rohingya community was a tragic example. The World Bank had estimated that 1 billion persons did not have documentary proof of their nationality or identity. Although not necessarily all stateless, they were all at risk of exclusion from basic services. In his report *Our Common Agenda*, the Secretary-General had stressed the need to see and recognize everyone, and it was encouraging that many States had made advances under the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness. Despite significant advances in national adherence to the two statelessness conventions, however, much remained to be done, particularly as some States had suspended civil and birth registrations during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby creating backlogs and increasing the risk of statelessness. UNHCR had made increasing financial support for and mainstreaming the #IBelong campaign a strategic priority.

29. The international protection crisis called for urgent global collaboration and, above all, political will. A number of initiatives under the global compact on refugees had been set up, including the Clean Energy Challenge and the Asylum Capacity Support Group. The regional support platforms had promoted regional collaboration and a whole-of-society approach had evolved. Religions for Peace had joined with UNHCR to create a group of leaders advising the High Commissioner. UNHCR was also stepping up cooperation with local refugee-led organizations, which had proved vital in efforts to combat COVID-19.

30. Real progress had been made since the convening of the Global Refugee Forum, and the High-level Officials Meeting in December 2021 would provide the opportunity to assess the evidence of progress under the global compact on refugees, including the survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on financing and development assistance for refugees. Senior government officials and stakeholders would take stock of achievements and identify gaps and solutions for consideration by the following Global Refugee Forum in 2023. Efforts must be redoubled to give practical meaning to the principle of equitable responsibility sharing; that was a key priority for UNHCR and one that embodied the international principle of solidarity.

31. **Ms. Moussa** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, reiterated her deep concern regarding the continued increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons around the world and the significant challenges to the protection of refugees, especially children, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The efforts of UNHCR to address those challenges were appreciated. The Arab Group remained committed to hosting and protecting refugees without discrimination and providing them with support, despite the severe impact of the pandemic – which had demonstrated that it was possible to balance public health considerations and the protection of refugees. Measures taken to support refugees by host countries included the provision of health care and vaccination against COVID-19, registration, mental health and psychosocial support, and the protection of persons with disabilities and older persons. She also noted the adoption by the Council of the League of Arab States in March 2021 of a strategy to prevent violence against refugees, especially sexual violence against women and girls. Concerted international efforts were needed to ease the burden on host countries and achieve fair and sustainable burden and responsibility sharing. Concerted international efforts and solidarity were needed to ensure

the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and access to vaccination for all refugees and displaced persons.

32. With respect to the note on international protection (A/AC.96/1211), the Group noted that the document, like any other internal document of UNHCR, reflected solely the viewpoint of the secretariat and did not necessarily reflect the positions of member States. The Group reaffirmed its reservation to the non-consensual language reflected in paragraph 30 of that document.

33. **Ms. Ayesha** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said that the note on international protection by UNHCR reflected only the secretariat's point of view, and not the position of member States. Although a revised version of the note had been issued to address concerns raised by delegations, serious concerns persisted. OIC therefore rejected the document, which ignored the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers, such as stereotyping, stigmatization, hate speech and violence. It was disappointing that UNHCR had chosen to focus on one dimension of the problem, based on the views expressed by the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. OIC rejected the assertion made in paragraph 30 that singled out many host countries. She expressed serious reservations about the engagement of UNHCR with the Independent Expert, whose mandate was controversial and was not supported by many OIC member countries.

34. UNHCR should refrain from promoting politically controversial mandates in its work or lending direct or indirect support or acquiescence to controversial concepts that could adversely affect its operations. The mandate and operations of UNHCR should remain apolitical and based on the universally agreed principles of objectivity, neutrality, impartiality and humanity.

35. OIC valued the work of UNHCR and many of its member countries were host countries, countries of origin and donors; members of OIC hosted more than two thirds of all refugees worldwide and many of the largest operations of UNHCR. OIC looked forward to continuing to contribute to the work of UNHCR, in accordance with the principle of international burden and responsibility sharing.

36. **Mr. Dávalos** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the new Group of Friends on Burden and Responsibility Sharing, said that the Group was being set up to discuss and share good practices and updates on national and regional developments in the area of burden and responsibility sharing, mobilize and promote diplomatic engagement on the principle of burden and responsibility sharing, and explore areas for further cooperation and development of pledges. All States Members of the United Nations were invited to join, the aim being to provide an inclusive platform to build on the momentum generated by the Global Refugee Forum in pursuit of equitable, predictable and sustainable burden and responsibility sharing. The Group would complement the work of the burden and responsibility sharing co-sponsors.

37. **Ms. Norton** (Canada) said that Canada continued to place its faith in international cooperation as the most effective means of ensuring respect for the legal regime underpinning refugee protection, while securing comprehensive responses to both emerging and protracted refugee and forced displacement situations. With responsibility sharing in mind, Canada aimed to maintain the momentum of the implementation of the global compact on refugees. It had renewed its multi-year refugee resettlement commitments, with a focus on supporting resettlement from regions with the highest need, notably, at the current time, Afghanistan.

38. Canada also contributed to international refugee protection by developing complementary pathways to admission under the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot, a scheme to help Canadian employers find skilled refugees to meet their labour needs and then to help those refugees secure permanent residence. Canada continued to promote the expansion of community sponsorship worldwide.

39. Protection and empowerment of women and girls had been chosen by Canada as the theme for its upcoming year as Chair of the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS) support platform.

40. Her country would continue to support UNHCR as it addressed numerous complex protection challenges in the context of the pandemic. However, the funds allocated under the



Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 were insufficient to meet the needs. As global protection cluster leader, UNHCR was well placed to ensure that protection remained at the core of humanitarian action.

41. **Ms. Nagahara** (Japan) said that protection needs varied from person to person owing to complex factors, including age, gender and diversity. Japan appreciated the additional efforts by UNHCR to prevent and respond to the increase in gender-based violence since the beginning of the pandemic.

42. Access to education for refugee children made a crucial contribution to protection, in addition to the opportunity it provided to nurture potential. Japan welcomed the initiatives and partnerships entered into by UNHCR with a range of stakeholders to provide better learning environments for refugee and other vulnerable children. She noted that 90 Syrian students were soon to start studying at universities in Japan and the Japan International Cooperation Agency was working with UNHCR to extend the Japanese Initiative for the Future of Syrian Refugees project in order to give Syrian students educational opportunities.

43. Japan shared the view that sporting activities provided opportunities for inclusion and protection and a chance to heal, develop and grow. It appreciated the initiative of UNHCR to promote sports programmes and partnerships.

44. **Ms. Arango Olmos** (Colombia) said that the number of asylum applications in her country had increased from 566 in 2016 to more than 12,000 in 2021 to date, giving a total of 37,000 applications for the past five years, 98 per cent of them from Venezuelan nationals. Every day substantial numbers of Venezuelans arrived, in a state of extreme vulnerability: desperate, malnourished and accompanying young children. Some of them, known as *caminantes* (walkers), had made the journey on foot. A programme had been created to refer *caminantes* to migrant transit centres where they could obtain UNHCR assistance.

45. In addition, 10-year temporary protection status was granted to Venezuelans, giving them access to education, health, and formal employment on an equal footing with Colombian nationals. Such socioeconomic inclusion was key to international protection and durable solutions.

46. She drew attention to the recent adoption of a memorandum of understanding between UNHCR and the Special Administrative Unit for Migration of Colombia (Migración Colombia), aimed at increasing cooperation to implement temporary protection status and provide training in international refugee law, international standards and the prevention of xenophobia.

47. **Ms. Nordlund** (Sweden) said that the extremely worrying situation in Afghanistan and the challenges in that region showed yet again the importance of greater coordination among States to support countries hosting large numbers of refugees and the need for access to legal pathways to protection.

48. Sweden maintained its yearly resettlement quota of 5,000 places in close cooperation with UNHCR and was committed to fulfilling its Global Refugee Forum undertaking to support an expanded and strategic global resettlement response. Sweden continued to work with the Priority Situations Core Group and supported the work on implementation of the three-year strategy on resettlement and complementary pathways.

49. Sweden would continue sharing its experience in strengthening asylum systems, including through the Asylum Capacity Support Group. In the European Union it would continue to be a strong voice for greater solidarity and responsibility sharing and for fair and effective asylum policies.

50. **Ms. Lehoux** (Switzerland) said that the pandemic had not only laid bare weak points in the international protection system, but it had also been a catalyst for change in ways of working, in part thanks to technological developments. From the outset, Switzerland had been determined to ensure the continuity of asylum procedures. It had also striven to fulfil its commitments to the Global Forum on Refugees regarding resettlement, creating a new programme for 2022–2023 with more than 1,900 places; it had also co-chaired the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement until June 2021.

51. She welcomed the innovative approach of UNHCR to the problem of increased violence against women, girls and children, for example putting in place remote services to reach those most at risk. Such new practices, which gave a key role to refugees themselves and to local women's organizations, should be maintained and strengthened once the pandemic was over.

52. Because of its role in protecting and integrating displaced children, education offered long-term solutions for refugees and displaced persons. The new Geneva hub on education in emergencies, proposed by Switzerland at the Global Refugee Forum, now had 30 members, including UNHCR. It was already working to rally local actors to promote the right to education of children affected by humanitarian crises. As to education for refugees in general, an integrated approach covering education, protection and sexual violence was essential in responding to the multiple risks facing displaced children.

53. **Mr. Dávalos** (Ecuador) said that it was regrettable that some countries' response to the unprecedented levels of displacement involved denial of the right to asylum and access to their territory, mass expulsion and outsourcing of asylum procedures. Such a lack of basic solidarity undermined the tenets of the 1951 Convention. The global priority should be to make asylum procedures fairer and more efficient, provide employment and educational opportunities and offer health care and social security.

54. Ecuador had a robust legal framework for the effective protection of displaced and stateless persons. Furthermore, the Organic Act on Human Mobility had recently been amended to extend protection to the additional category of refugee *sur place*. The pandemic had prompted the use of new tools that allowed those in need to access asylum procedures more easily, and special teams had been set up to expedite the issuance of identity papers to those granted refugee status.

55. Ecuador had included refugees and migrants, regardless of status, in its highly successful national COVID-19 vaccination programme. To have done otherwise would have created an immediate health risk to them and to their host communities and fomented xenophobia, violence and further exclusion.

56. **Ms. Lachaussée** (France) said that the pandemic had confronted States with a dual challenge, that of guaranteeing access to care for all populations, including displaced persons and refugees, while also protecting health systems. Where States found themselves forced to suspend or derogate from some rights for public health reasons, they should do so within a clear legal framework that observed the principles of necessity, proportionality and non-discrimination. Refugees and displaced persons should be included in international and national pandemic response strategies, with access to vaccines, diagnostic procedures and treatment. States had a responsibility to ensure access to free, diverse and reliable information.

57. In line with its undertaking to the Global Forum to accept persons from third countries, once the external borders of the European Union had reopened, France had established an exemption procedure to ensure people eligible for its asylum visa could enter the country without delay. The waiver applied also to others who had been granted admission before the pandemic started. Protection programmes in countries of first asylum had resumed, with officials deployed to Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to interview applicants for resettlement in France. The resettlement programme had been rolled out in three more countries of first settlement, namely Cameroon, Ethiopia and Rwanda.

58. Action for vulnerable populations was increasingly linked to changes and upheavals associated with climate and mass internal displacement. France would continue to work with the Platform on Disaster Displacement, which it had chaired for two years. As President of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022, it would also be organizing the first European Humanitarian Forum, in January, when the topic of refugee protection would figure prominently.

59. **Mr. Winder** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom commended UNHCR staff for their determination to stay and deliver in extremely difficult circumstances. It appreciated the Office's work in contexts of conflict and violence, including its work in support of refugees in Tigray, its continued advocacy for comprehensive protection for Syrian refugees and its work in Afghanistan and the surrounding region.

60. Notwithstanding the innovative approaches to registration, refugee status determination and sexual and gender-based violence that had been introduced in response to the pandemic, it was disturbing that reporting on COVID-19 cases, deaths and vaccinations disaggregated by sex, age and disability had declined in humanitarian contexts. In both Nigeria and Somalia, less than a third of vaccine doses had gone to women. He hoped UNHCR would continue to work with Governments and partners to identify and target priority at-risk groups, facilitate equitable access and monitor who benefited from vaccine roll-out by collecting and analysing disaggregated data for its persons of concern.

61. The United Kingdom was pleased to see that UNHCR recognized programming to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence as a lifesaving institutional priority. It also welcomed the Office's new five-year action plan on disability inclusion and supported an inclusive approach to addressing displaced persons' needs, covering groups such as LGBT+ and religious and ethnic minorities.

62. **Mr. Rose** (Australia) said that, under his country's Humanitarian Program, 13,750 visas for resettlement would be granted. Australia continued to focus on resettlement for vulnerable women and children, unaccompanied minors, LGBTQI+ persons and refugees willing to settle in regional Australia. His Government also remained committed to complementary pathways: the Community Support Program enabled communities, businesses, families or individuals to propose and support humanitarian visa applicants who had employment prospects; the Government was also working with Talent Beyond Boundaries to pilot a Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement programme, intended to offer skilled refugees an additional means of settling in Australia.

63. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines), noting that his delegation supported adoption of the reports on the work of the Standing Committee, said national policies and programmes for persons of concern needed to remain in effect, even during public health emergencies. In the Philippines, as highlighted in the note on international protection, programmes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had covered displaced and stateless persons, including the provision of basic services.

64. There must be greater acknowledgement that climate change was one of the root causes of displacement. UNHCR was an important forum for highlighting the climate crisis and advocating for climate justice, resilience and building back better. His Government encouraged UNHCR to continue to address climate-related displacement and the international community to build on existing partnerships within the framework of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. It also urged the international community to preserve existing solutions, including complementary pathways.

65. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany) said that Germany supported the UNHCR position that public health measures did not justify any breaches of the principle of non-refoulement or denial of access to asylum.

66. His Government had, in 2020, allocated an additional €450 million for addressing the humanitarian impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, €55 million of which had gone to UNHCR. In 2021, it had provided €40 million for UNHCR operations relating to the Afghanistan situation and had, for the first time, funded the role of UNHCR in the Global Protection Cluster.

67. As its commitment to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and the fact that it had put the topic on the agenda of the Security Council during its membership showed, his Government was prioritizing the issue of sexual and gender-based violence. It was funding vital services for sexual and gender-based violence survivors, including intensive care, protection services and psychosocial support. Women and girls needed to be adequately represented in capacity-building efforts for humanitarian responses.

68. The fundamental principle of voluntary returns must be upheld, multiple displacements must be prevented and action must be taken to prevent returnees from having to flee their homes again.

69. Internally displaced persons constituted by far the largest group among the forcibly displaced. Germany supported the work of UNHCR with internally displaced persons and its

leadership role in the Global Protection Cluster. It welcomed the engagement of UNHCR in finding responses to climate change. It also welcomed, in that regard, the recommendations put forward by the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement in its report on internal displacement issued the previous month. It was now crucial to ensure meaningful follow-up to those recommendations in order to effect systemic change.

70. **Mr. Damiani Pellegrini** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his Government was concerned at the potential confusion between the categories of “refugee”, “asylum seeker” and “migrant”, each of which was governed by distinct legal frameworks. It rejected the apparent new category of person of interest of “Venezuelans displaced abroad” in the strongest terms, since it was clear they could not be classed as either displaced persons or refugees, much less persons whose protection fell within the mandate of UNHCR. His Government urged the States that were processing asylum applications to duly identify those needing international protection.

71. Conflict in Colombia remained the largest source of internally displaced persons and refugees in the region. The delegation was unaware of any expression of concern by UNHCR about the several million Colombians hosted by their country, who had been given access, without discrimination on the basis of migration status, to health care, food, education, housing and many other social programmes.

72. The statement, in the note on international protection, that Venezuelans continued to leave their country in increasing numbers, owing to economic and political instability, and insecurity, was political in nature and had no theoretical or methodological basis. The report *Update on UNHCR’s operations in the Americas*, dated 20 September 2021, stated that migrants and refugees from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela totalled 5.7 million persons worldwide, that 171,000 of those were recognized as refugees and that some 850,000 asylum claims had been lodged worldwide. He wondered whether the remaining 4 million people should be classed as economic migrants and, if so, why UNHCR grouped them with refugees. Given that most of the Venezuelans who were outside their home country were economic migrants, his Government was concerned that UNHCR did not refer to the most significant underlying cause of their migration: the unilateral measures imposed by the United States of America on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in a clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

73. Despite repeated formal requests to support it, his Government’s Return to the Homeland Plan – under which many Venezuelans were returning to their home country owing to a lack of safeguards in some host countries and to high rates of xenophobia, discrimination and racism – had been ignored by UNHCR. In that connection, the delegation condemned the public burning, by Chilean nationals, of the belongings of a group of Venezuelan migrants in Iquique, Chile, on 25 September 2021. He called on the Governments of the region to ensure Venezuelans’ safety and on the High Commissioner to issue a statement on the matter.

74. **Ms. Rambøll** (Norway) said that her Government commended UNHCR for its efforts on protection of forcibly displaced persons. Operational protection measures, at the country level, should remain the top priority of UNHCR; it was also a priority for the humanitarian strategy of Norway. Protection measures needed to include emergency education and action against sexual and gender-based violence. There was a need to follow up on the work of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement to strengthen international efforts to improve the situation of internally displaced persons.

75. Turning to resettlement and asylum, she said that there was a continuous need to increase the number of settlement places and the number of States contributing. In the context of the pandemic, it was also important to uphold the right to seek international protection. However, in order for States’ asylum systems to work properly, adequate systems were also needed for the return of those not deemed to be in need of international protection.

76. **Mr. Yassin** (Sudan) said that his country had never closed its borders to refugees from neighbouring countries. In the Sudan, the refugee programme was divided into an emergency plan, a durable solutions plan and a maintenance plan. On the recommendation of the High Commissioner, the strategic plan for refugees was being overhauled in cooperation with UNHCR; it was hoped that oversight and assessment, in particular, would improve as a result.

One benefit of the revised strategic plan was that the available resources could be allocated on the basis of need and were, therefore, being put to better use. His Government had submitted a plan to UNHCR for registration of all refugees in the Sudan in late 2021 and early 2022; he hoped that UNHCR would agree to fund it.

77. The main obstacle faced by the refugee programme of the Sudan was that it was just 35–50 per cent funded. Refugees in Sudan represented a cost in terms of impact on the environment and strain on infrastructure. There was also an impact on the host communities, since refugees used the same, often limited, services as they, in particular in rural areas. Whether in urban or rural areas, 70 per cent of refugees lived in the open air.

78. **Mr. McNicholas** (United States of America) said that the sanctions imposed by his Government and its allies were an appropriate, effective and legitimate means of achieving foreign policy goals, in line with international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Sanctions were employed to promote accountability for serious human rights abuses and to impose financial consequences on officials who threatened the stability of international political and economic systems.

79. The Presidential Memorandum on Advancing the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Persons Around the World had made clear that the comprehensive international human rights agenda of the United States incorporated eliminating violence and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, including against refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. The President had called for expanded resettlement solutions for LGBTIQ+ persons, including through greater use of referrals from non-governmental organizations and a private sponsorship pilot programme.

80. Federal Government agencies were developing a report on the impact of climate change on all forms of migration, which was to include consideration of options on protection and resettlement of individuals displaced directly or indirectly by climate change. The report would be shared with UNHCR.

81. His Government condemned in the strongest possible terms the unprecedented action of the Government of Ethiopia to expel senior United Nations officials involved in ongoing humanitarian operations. The United States also urged all countries to respect the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement.

82. **Mr. Frenkel** (Israel) said that his Government welcomed the reference in the note on international protection to the challenges that LGBTIQ+ persons faced because their sexual orientation or gender identity was often the reason why they had sought asylum in the first place. Removal of such considerations could undermine the protection mandate UNHCR held. The fact that UNHCR was working with the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and with organizations representing LGBTIQ+ persons to address the situation demonstrated a commitment to enhancing cooperation with other mandate holders and a better understanding of the situation and challenges, including discrimination and violence, that LGBTIQ+ persons might suffer.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*