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Summary record of the 748th meeting

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Chair: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Vice-Chair) (Djibouti)

Contents

General debate (*continued*)

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In the absence of Mr. Baddoura (Lebanon), Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

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

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Spasovski** (North Macedonia) said that, while the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its attendant health challenges had marked the past few years, the global challenges currently faced held even greater consequences, constituting a substantial threat to the global security architecture and the international order and for the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Meetings held under the auspices of the United Nations and UNHCR had thus become even more valuable means of exchanging ideas and experiences, seeking humane and dignified solutions and, above all, preserving peace.

2. As a party to key international instruments, including the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, North Macedonia strongly supported the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. His Government had taken steps to harmonize the country's legislation with the regulations and directives of the European Union on asylum and migration. Moreover, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had been an early adopter of online platforms to be able to conduct interviews with asylum-seekers while protecting their health and that of government officials.

3. The Government had placed a priority on deepening cooperation with countries of the region, countries of transit and origin, United Nations system entities and the European Union and its agencies, including the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). Several projects aimed at further harmonization with European Union standards on migration and border management were under way. Negotiations on an agreement on enhancing border management and combating irregular migration had been completed. It constituted the first agreement between the European Union and North Macedonia, a European Union candidate country.

4. His country's international standing had changed in recent years owing to progress made in respect of the rule of law, democracy, human rights and multi-ethnic relations. It had been admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in March 2020 and had been selected as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chair for 2023. To solve global challenges, greater international efforts were needed to encourage global dialogue and cooperation, foster a culture of tolerance and peace, based on respect for human rights and international law, and promote good-neighbourly relations. As OSCE Chair, North Macedonia would direct its efforts towards those objectives.

5. **Mr. Agok Tur** (Observer for South Sudan) said that his Government was committed to implementing the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. To that end, a road map had been agreed and the current transitional period had been extended. On 30 August 2022, the first cohort of the unified forces had graduated, marking the completion of a vital part of the security arrangements under the Agreement. Moreover, the national legislature had been revitalized, the constitutional development process had been launched and economic reforms had been instituted.

6. South Sudan was committed to protecting refugees and welcoming home returnees. Despite being a new nation and facing challenges such as the climate crisis and conflicts, his country was currently hosting more than 340,000 refugees. They were included in national plans, provided with identification cards and benefited from access to basic services and freedom of movement in South Sudan. In addition, some 4,000 hectares of valuable agricultural land had been allocated to refugees in the Ruweng Administrative Area. Nevertheless, the need to develop a comprehensive national approach, with the support of the Office and development partners, including the World Bank, was recognized.

7. Although South Sudanese people had been displaced for decades, more than 600,000 had voluntarily returned home since 2018. He welcomed the partnership between the Office and his Government aimed at supporting the provision of basic services, benefiting not only

returnees but also the displaced population, refugees and host communities. The Revitalized Peace Agreement also offered an opportunity to create an enabling environment for voluntary return. To that end, a comprehensive strategy to provide urgent humanitarian assistance and basic services in areas of potential return was needed.

8. His Government appreciated the efforts of UNHCR and the High Commissioner in South Sudan. His country looked forward to long-term engagements with development partners to ensure access to basic services and enable returnees to remain in their homes.

9. **Mr. Nassin** (Observer for Central African Republic) said that a window of opportunity had opened for his country on 27 April 2022 with the adoption by seven countries of the region, including his own, of the Yaoundé Declaration, a regional framework aimed at seeking and implementing solutions to displacement linked to the crisis in the Central African Republic. The Declaration contained a number of commitments in that regard, including on social inclusion, registration and biometric systems, and voluntary repatriation. For its part, his Government continued to promote access to asylum, to date for 493 asylum-seekers; their claims were being processed in accordance with the rules to determine their refugee status. In that connection, an order had been issued on 20 May 2022 granting prima facie refugee status to refugees, including those from South Sudan, guaranteeing them protection and assistance. Moreover, identification and travel documents had been provided free of charge to 493 asylum-seekers, 11,083 refugees and 31,651 returnees to facilitate their freedom of movement.

10. On the occasion of World Refugee Day, his Government and UNHCR had called upon State and private actors alike to ensure the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and returnees in their national and development programmes. His Government had also continued to offer long-term refugees the opportunity of voluntary repatriation and local integration through naturalization or residency. In terms of the repatriation of Central African refugees, some 8,560 families had benefited from assistance to aid in their return.

11. Against the backdrop of budgetary cuts and crisis, his country faced enormous challenges, ranging from relocating refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and carrying out the biometric and physical verification of refugees to providing socioeconomic support to refugees to facilitate their integration, assisting vulnerable persons and reintegrating returnees. With the assistance of UNHCR, a national policy for the protection of refugees would be drafted and added to existing strategies and standard operating procedures on asylum, assistance and durable solutions. With that in mind, he wished to appeal for the mobilization of funds to support progress in his country's protection activities and the effective implementation of the Yaoundé Declaration.

12. **Mr. Küüt** (Estonia) said that the world was a very different place compared with 2021, when humanitarian needs had already been at an all-time high. Estonia remained concerned about numerous situations around the world, such as in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar. In 2022, the devastating milestone of 100 million forcibly displaced persons had been exceeded, with 10 million more displaced persons than in 2021. Much of that increase was due to the Russian war of aggression, which had caused more than 7.5 million new refugees and internally displaced 7 million more, most of them women and children. Some 40 per cent of the Ukrainian population – more than 17.7 million people – was now in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

13. The Russian aggression against Ukraine was a blatant violation of international law. It was the direct cause of increasing food insecurity, rising food prices and an energy crisis that was affecting millions of vulnerable people globally. It had led to the worst humanitarian, refugee and food crisis since the Second World War. Despite the repeated calls of the General Assembly and the International Court of Justice, the Russian Federation had, just the previous day, launched a large-scale missile attack on cities across Ukraine, causing unforgivable loss of life and damage. His Government condemned those attacks in the strongest possible terms.

14. Estonia was doing its part to share the burden, including by sending €22 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine and hosting Ukrainian refugees in numbers equivalent to 4 per cent of the Estonian population. To provide those refugees with an effective response, a whole-of-society approach was being taken, and the procedure for granting temporary

protection had been streamlined. In such challenging times, when working apart was no longer an option, his Government particularly welcomed the Office's focus on longer-term, durable solutions that brought humanitarian, development and peace actors together. UNHCR could count on his Government's continued support as a flexible donor.

15. **Mr. Kangi** (Kenya) said that his Government recognized the need for greater burden- and responsibility-sharing and had been a committed global solidarity partner for decades. It was currently hosting more than 560,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and East Africa.

16. In an effort to honour its international obligations and take collective action to address displacement, the new Refugee Act had been adopted, providing access to registration, documentation and employment. A framework and plan of action had also been adopted to facilitate the implementation of the global compact on refugees. His Government remained concerned at the low numbers of repatriation and resettlement. To date, fewer than 60,000 refugees in Kenya had been helped to resettle in third countries since 2015. Kenya called for enhanced global solidarity and burden- and responsibility-sharing in order to find durable solutions for displaced persons. Ahead of the second Global Refugee Forum, demonstrable progress on the quality, size and scope of development would be crucial.

17. His Government wished to underscore the gravity of the climate crisis affecting the Horn of Africa, which, after four failed rainy seasons, was experiencing its most severe drought in recent history. The drought had aggravated an already dire situation in a fragile region, triggering internal and external displacement and compounding other protracted drivers of forced displacement, in particular violent conflict. Extremely urgent, collective action was needed to avert a disaster. He emphasized the importance of renewed action and responsibility-sharing to address protracted situations, especially those that no longer received global attention, and to ensure that protracted conflicts remained central to discussions and received the commensurate support necessary to address them. In that regard, the growing focus on the humanitarian-development nexus was welcome, since development was key to finding durable solutions, addressing root causes and ensuring that hard-won gains were neither lost nor reversed.

18. His Government called upon the international community to increase resettlement places, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees; provide additional support to peace and development initiatives in countries of origin so as to achieve sustainable, voluntary repatriation of refugees; enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing to countries hosting refugees through additional funding for their programmes; leverage partnerships with the private sector and development actors to harness development assistance; and reduce the negative impact on the environment by ensuring the use of sustainable, green and climate-smart practices in host countries.

19. **Mr. Atroshenko** (Russian Federation) said that providing assistance to refugees was central to efforts aimed at maintaining international peace, security and stability. Identifying the root causes was key to addressing mass forced migration flows. The Russian Federation adhered to its international obligations with regard to refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, including by applying the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and supported efforts to enhance the effectiveness of international protection. Moreover, the approaches adopted by his Government to protect refugees were fully in accordance with the Global Compact on Refugees. The Russian Federation would continue to adopt measures aimed at protecting asylum-seekers in conformity with its international commitments.

20. Stateless persons and foreign citizens seeking international protection were protected under Russian law, irrespective of their country of origin, nationality or race, and 800,000 stateless persons had received Russian citizenship since 1992. At the current time, 71,000 people from more than 60 countries had been granted asylum in the Russian Federation.

21. Between 18 February and 29 September 2022, the Russian Federation had received more than 4.5 million refugees from the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic and Ukraine. Among other measures, temporary shelters had been set up to accommodate those refugees and procedures had been put in place to grant temporary asylum. Registration procedures for internally displaced persons had also been streamlined.

Refugees were offered free medical care, given the right to seek employment in his country and were entitled to certain benefits. The continuous stay of persons of concern within the territory of the Russian Federation had been extended to 180 days from the date of entry. Accelerated procedures were in place to grant citizenship, and social mechanisms had been put in place to provide support for internally displaced persons from the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic and Ukraine and facilitate their integration into Russian society. He wished to emphasize that his Government appreciated the work done by UNHCR and would continue to offer the Office its unwavering support.

22. **Mr. Tour** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had been hosting refugees since the 1960s and was currently home to a purported 1.3 million of them, although that was an underestimate. The Government was striving to rectify the situation and would continue to do so within the limits of available resources. A comprehensive biometric registration exercise was being conducted by the national Commission for Refugees in close cooperation with the Office.

23. Although the Sudan was taking the encampment approach to refugee response, approximately 70 per cent of refugees resided outside camps, mainly in urban areas. They fell into three broad categories: long-term refugees, who had chosen to remain in the country after the closure of the camps in which they had been living; refugees in protracted situations in or outside camps; and new refugees, who had arrived since 2020. The Government's refugee response could be divided into two parts: the delivery of emergency services to new arrivals and their host communities; and the promotion of self-reliance among all refugees and host communities. In addition, the Government provided protection services and sought to ensure the economic and social inclusion of refugees at the local and national levels and to mitigate their negative impact on the environment. A failure to achieve those objectives would make it difficult for the Sudan to maintain its famous and widely appreciated hospitality towards refugees and its associated open-door policy.

24. The Government's response was based on the principle of burden-sharing among refugee-hosting countries and the international community. It wished to reiterate its unwavering commitment to supporting and implementing durable solutions for refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and host communities in the Sudan and South Sudan. In that regard, a national strategy had been drawn up and was ready for approval by the competent authorities. The strategy had been drafted in a comprehensive and inclusive manner that brought together all relevant stakeholders.

25. **Mr. Attafuah** (Ghana) said that his Government wished to reaffirm the need for stakeholders to implement the commitments contained in the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement.

26. The Government ensured that refugees were not left behind by registering them and issuing them with a national identity document known as the Ghana Card, which was mandatory for all citizens and residents and granted access to various services and facilities. The issuance of the card to refugees was a major step in guaranteeing their social and financial inclusion. The Government's policy was that all refugees must be able to access services on an equal footing with citizens. Nationals of Burkina Faso who had sought refuge in Ghana on account of the security situation in their country were being registered and accorded the necessary protection.

27. Over the previous year, Ghana had continued to collaborate with the Office to find and implement durable solutions for Ivorian refugees. It had worked with partners to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees by guaranteeing them safe passage and trusted that the Office would complete the repatriation of the over 800 remaining Ivorian refugees who had expressed a desire to return home. Ghana had also processed, up to the final appeal level, applications for exemption from the effects of the cessation clause invoked in June 2022 for 1,349 Ivorian refugees and had granted indefinite residency to 955 former Ivorian refugees who had opted to remain in Ghana.

28. The Government had taken note of the appeal to UNHCR by the Government of Liberia to assist with the repatriation of Liberian refugees from Ghana. The Ghana Refugee Board had successfully intervened to stop the planned decommissioning of the Buduburam refugee camp in September 2021. The camp, which had once hosted Liberian refugees, had

become an unauthorized home for Ghanaian nationals and former Liberian refugees, some of whom had been repatriated voluntarily before deciding to return to the camp. Following high-level talks, a road map had been developed to repatriate non-refugee Liberians from the camp. Ghana remained committed to ensuring that former Liberian refugees were repatriated in a safe and humane manner, subject to the availability of funding, and to ensuring that the camp was properly decommissioned in a manner consistent with domestic and international law and the country's human rights obligations.

29. **Ms. Mbarushimana** (Observer for Burundi) said that, according to the most recent statistics, Burundi was hosting 86,816 asylum-seekers and refugees, of whom 54,347 lived in camps and 28,636 lived in urban areas. They all enjoyed an adequate level of protection, in accordance with relevant national and international laws. Burundi was also hosting 1,188 people at risk of statelessness. A national action plan to combat statelessness was in the pipeline.

30. Burundi was home to five refugee camps, which were currently full. The Government had made land available and was awaiting funds from the Office to build a sixth camp to cope with possible influxes. The country had received more than 200,000 returnees between 2017 and 30 September 2022. The significant recent decrease in the number of candidates for voluntary return highlighted the need for support for technical meetings and tripartite meetings with countries of asylum. To encourage voluntary returns, it was important to strengthen strategies for the effective and sustainable reintegration of returnees. In particular, efforts should focus on promoting economic resilience and on providing decent shelter, community health-care services and schooling.

31. With the aim of promoting peaceful cohesion between refugees and host communities, the Government was implementing the Integrated Community Development Project to empower refugees through cooperatives, micro-businesses and income-generating activities. The Project, funded by the World Bank, also involved the construction of socioeconomic infrastructure to foster the inclusion of refugees in the education and health-care systems. It would contribute to the school reintegration of repatriated students by helping to bridge curriculum gaps.

32. The Government had developed a project to support productive social safety nets and jobs that would facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national social protection schemes. Through the project, refugees and host communities would benefit from cash transfers, productive inclusion activities and measures to develop human capital.

33. The Government wished to reiterate its commitment to protecting refugees and asylum-seekers, as far as resources allowed, and to implementing relevant international conventions. It invited UNHCR to support the repatriation and reintegration of Burundian refugees who were still scattered across countries of asylum.

34. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he was glad to hear about the progress made by North Macedonia in dealing with asylum issues. The country lay on the complex Western Balkan route, along which there had been an increase in population flows. He looked forward to the country chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2023.

35. The statistics mentioned by the representative of Estonia illustrated the efforts made by neighbouring and other countries to receive people fleeing the terrible war in Ukraine. The representative had rightly emphasized the wider impact of the war around the world. The international community had to be aware of that impact and assist affected countries and individuals outside Europe.

36. He acknowledged the points raised by the Russian Federation. His Office would keep trying to expand its access to refugees, in particular Ukrainian refugees, in the territory of the Russian Federation. He completely agreed that there was a need to address the root causes of refugee movements. Ending the war in Ukraine would be a major step in that direction.

37. Efforts were ongoing to reach agreement on refugee statistics for the Sudan, which was a key host country. He was happy to note that, despite the complex political situation there, the Government remained committed to discussing solutions for refugees and

internally displaced persons in the country and for Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

38. He had heard a clear commitment from South Sudan to continue to implement the peace agreement, which would be fundamental to the success of the durable solutions strategy in the country. While the situation remained fragile, some 600,000 people had returned in recent years. South Sudan continued to host more than 300,000 Sudanese refugees. It was important to look for solutions to the situation through broad regional cooperation.

39. In Kenya, which was another key host country, drought made it harder to find solutions to refugee issues and created further displacement. He was pleased to note the positive developments that had taken place in the country in recent months, including the Government's embracing of the comprehensive refugee response framework and the highly advanced whole-of-society approach adopted in Kakuma.

40. Burundi was at once a country of asylum and a country of return. The decline in applications for return, particularly from Tanzania, was indeed worrying, though there was a voluntary element that had to be accepted. Greater investment was needed in Burundi to create better conditions for people to return. The international community had a responsibility to support the sustainable and durable repatriation of Burundian nationals.

41. He celebrated the adoption of the Yaoundé Declaration. As the country of origin, the Central African Republic had a great responsibility to facilitate the implementation of the Declaration. It was to be commended for continuing to host refugees, in particular from South Sudan, despite the challenges that it was facing.

42. He was pleased to hear about the issuance of the Ghana Card to refugees. The arrival of more refugees from Burkina Faso was cause for concern. It suggested that further investment was needed to improve the situation in the central Sahel region. He wished to thank Ghana for being one of the main actors in bringing to an end the situation of Ivorian refugees through the application of a cessation clause and related activities.

43. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that, despite the objective established in the Agenda for Humanity to reduce internal displacement by at least 50 per cent by 2030, the number of displaced persons worldwide continued to reach unprecedented levels. As noted in the High Commissioner's most recent report, Europe was facing its largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. Azerbaijan supported the Secretary-General's timely Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, which highlighted that finding solutions to internal displacement was a priority for peace and development.

44. Over the previous three decades, Azerbaijan had been hosting one of the highest numbers of forcibly displaced persons in the world in per capita terms, with such persons accounting for roughly 10 per cent of the country's population. It had gained enormous experience and knowledge of dealing with large-scale displacement. To date, as many as 320,000 refugees and internally displaced persons had been provided with improved housing in the country. Moreover, the rate of poverty among internally displaced persons had fallen from 75 per cent to 8 per cent. However, the only durable solution to the protracted displacement situation in Azerbaijan was to find a political settlement to the conflict with Armenia, which, for almost 30 years, had occupied 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan, in defiance of Security Council resolutions. The victory of Azerbaijan in the 44-day war of 2020 had put an end to the long-standing occupation and had created conditions conducive to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of hundreds of thousands of its citizens.

45. The Government currently faced an enormous task in restoring and sustainably developing the liberated areas and in ensuring the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons. It was implementing security measures and carrying out significant infrastructure projects based on the concept of smart cities and villages. He was pleased to report that the first wave of returnees had moved back to their homes during the summer of 2022. The return of internally displaced persons and the economic reintegration of the liberated areas had been declared as one of five national goals for socioeconomic development to be achieved by 2030. A bill on repatriation to, and reintegration in, the liberated territories had been drafted with the advisory support of UNHCR and other international stakeholders.

46. Armenia had contaminated a large amount of land in Azerbaijan with mines and other unexploded ordnance. By refusing to hand over accurate mine maps, it continued to commit gross violations of fundamental human rights, especially the right to life. Landmines were negatively affecting the inalienable right of internally displaced persons to return to their homes in a safe and dignified manner. More than 250 Azerbaijani citizens had been killed or maimed by mines since the signing of the trilateral statement by the leaders of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia in November 2020.

47. Despite the challenges of mine contamination and the destruction of infrastructure, the Government was confident that, with the concerted efforts of the international community, Azerbaijan would soon serve as a model of post-conflict rehabilitation and the reintegration of displaced persons and would bring prosperity to the liberated areas. Restoring justice for internally displaced persons was a solid foundation for long-term peace and stability in the region.

48. The Government enjoyed effective cooperation with UNHCR based on the common goal of providing protection and adequate assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. Azerbaijan was a strong supporter of the Office's mandate and was striving to fulfil its international commitments in relation to migration and refugee issues. The Government had introduced policies to facilitate the access of refugees and asylum-seekers to the labour market, the compulsory health insurance system and other basic services.

49. Azerbaijan had honoured its pledges from the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and continued to take measures to meet the commitments it had made at the high-level segment on statelessness. It believed that fair solutions could be found only through the fulfilment of accepted international commitments, mutual respect and an awareness of responsibilities to future generations.

50. **Mr. Kinfe** (Ethiopia) said that Ethiopians' tradition of generosity meant that, despite conflict and drought, Ethiopia hosted more than 875,000 refugees and had continued to receive asylum-seekers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it faced a range of crises and enjoyed limited international support, his Government had made significant progress towards the pledges that it had made as co-convenor of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, providing access to education, primary health care and sustainable employment for refugees.

51. Nevertheless, burden-sharing in the international community was inadequate, inequitable and inconsistent, and refugee operations in Ethiopia had suffered significant ration cuts. All refugees, regardless of origin, were equally vulnerable and deserved fair attention from donors. His Government's measures to mitigate the significant environmental impact of refugee operations included tree planting and the piloting of energy efficient equipment and alternative energy sources. He called on UNHCR and other stakeholders to increase their investment in, and commitment to, renewable energy and to provide additional support to manage the millions of internally displaced persons in Ethiopia.

52. **Mr. Leggett** (Australia) said that Australia acknowledged the tireless efforts of UNHCR to deliver protection services around the world, despite compounding risks and limited resources. The increased humanitarian need caused by the many ongoing crises at the global level must be addressed through improved international cooperation and responsibility-sharing, to which Australia was committed, as illustrated by its strong support for the Global Compact on Refugees and the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime. Australia would continue its generous humanitarian and settlement programmes and was piloting new pathways for refugees and displaced persons.

53. The significant funding gap of UNHCR was cause for concern, as was the reduction in funding for crisis responses in the Asia-Pacific region, where his Government focused its humanitarian assistance and where climate disasters would likely increase displacement. UNHCR should continue to communicate how prioritization and other difficult decisions would affect operations, particularly where it was the central coordinator of a response. Donors should follow his Government's lead in committing to providing predictable and flexible funding over the coming four years. Australia had also contributed an additional \$21

million to the Afghanistan and Ukraine appeals. The Office should share the lessons learned in relation to the localization of humanitarian response and meaningful refugee participation, which were critical to effective and sustainable solutions.

54. **Mr. Maritz** (Namibia), highlighting that most asylum-seekers and refugees in his country came from the Great Lakes region, said that his Government planned to engage with countries in that region on the matter of voluntary repatriation. Current voluntary repatriation efforts had received a mixed response, and Namibia urged UNHCR to address push and pull factors and consider invoking cessation clauses to allow for the return of refugees to countries where peace had been restored; such persons should be hosted as migrants rather than refugees. The rights of asylum-seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons could be protected only if the groups responsible for conflict renounced violence in favour of dialogue.

55. His Government had worked with UNHCR to build schools and a health-care clinic. There was political will in Namibia to address statelessness, and, given the phenomenon's close links to undocumented migration, the Government had launched a regularization project and planned to adopt legislation on that process. Despite the numerous challenges facing the country, including climate change and youth unemployment, Namibia would fulfil its international obligations by providing humanitarian assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees.

56. **Mr. Khatri** (Observer for Nepal) said that his Government commended UNHCR on its responses to complex humanitarian challenges around the world in the face of capacity constraints and multiple crises; in that context, enhanced international cooperation and solidarity were required to address the plight of refugees and other vulnerable groups. Those crises included climate change, to which Nepal was particularly vulnerable, and he urged States to fulfil their climate financing commitments. Despite limited resources, Nepal had for decades provided shelter and livelihood opportunities to thousands of Bhutanese refugees, around 6,000 of whom remained. Its extensive efforts to seek a solution had been hindered by the Bhutanese Government's rigidity and failure to abide by agreements. Given that countries of origin bore the biggest responsibility for creating the necessary conditions for safe return, he urged the Government of Bhutan to find a solution, and he called on the international community to give priority attention to the problem.

57. **Ms. Valls Noyes** (United States of America), speaking on behalf of the Friends of the I Belong Campaign to End Statelessness, said that the effects of statelessness, such as exclusion from public services, could be severe and lifelong. Most stateless persons belonged to minority groups, and they often experienced discrimination that led to their marginalization. Ending statelessness required greater effort to eliminate the discrimination, for example in legislation and civil registration systems, that deprived individuals of nationality. The Friends had welcomed Member States' meaningful actions throughout the global campaign to end statelessness within a decade and to implement the pledges made at the 2019 high-level segment on statelessness and Global Refugee Forum; with just two years of the campaign remaining, those efforts should be redoubled and similar pledges made at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. As the campaign drew to an end, statelessness risked being exacerbated by the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and food insecurity, combined with historic levels of forced displacement; the international community's response to such displacement must include stateless persons.

58. Central to the campaign's efforts was the acknowledgement that statelessness was largely avoidable and, with adequate political will, entirely solvable. The Group of Friends welcomed the continued support of UNHCR for the implementation of Member States' pledges and national action plans on statelessness, and it encouraged UNHCR to dedicate sufficient resources to its Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024 and to sustain momentum beyond 2024. Civil society played a crucial role in resolving statelessness and protecting stateless persons. Member States, for their part, must enhance their efforts to resolve existing statelessness, prevent new cases and protect stateless persons. Most importantly, Member States, the Office and other stakeholders must listen to stateless persons to understand their needs, challenges and hopes.

59. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), expressing his strong support for the Friends of the I Belong Campaign, said that, while much had been done to achieve the campaign's ambitious targets, with just two years to go until its conclusion, efforts must be redoubled and new pledges made. The clear momentum towards reducing statelessness should continue. The dramatic events of recent years had highlighted the importance of reducing statelessness and including stateless persons in, for example, vaccination campaigns.

60. The Azerbaijani Government's engagement on legislative matters and access to the labour market for refugees was welcome. UNHCR remained committed to working with Azerbaijan and Armenia to ensure the voluntary, sustainable return of persons displaced by the long-standing conflict, and he hoped that Azerbaijan would continue to support refugee operations elsewhere in the world. UNHCR was also committed to promoting international protection in the Bali Process, a matter that should be prioritized by States that had adhered to the Process, along with controls and security. The additional funding provided by Australia was particularly important given the situation in the Asia-Pacific region. He wished to repeat his concern at funding levels for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

61. He welcomed the attention drawn to the link between climate and displacement by countries, such as Nepal, that faced particular challenges as a result of the climate crisis. The lack of a resolution to the situation of the Bhutanese refugees who remained in Nepal was frustrating, and he appealed to the States in the region and elsewhere, including Bhutan, to find a solution. UNHCR was always willing to discuss the repatriation of refugees in Namibia; those discussions must also include countries of origin. The volatility in the Great Lakes region meant, however, that careful consideration was required to ensure that the necessary conditions were in place in countries of origin to invoke cessation clauses, a step that UNHCR would take whenever possible. The particularly complex root causes of displacement in the region should not discourage repatriation efforts.

62. Ethiopia had been pioneering in its approach to refugee inclusion and had played an important role at the global level as co-convenor of the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. Nevertheless, the worsening conflict in the country had increased the number of internally displaced persons, and UNHCR was committed to providing the same level of support to them as it did to refugees; it was important that it had access to persons in need. Ration cuts affected food security throughout Africa and the Middle East, and resource mobilization was therefore vital not only to UNHCR, but also to its partners, such as the World Food Programme.

63. **Ms. Jardfelt** (Sweden) said that her Government condemned the indiscriminate attacks carried out recently by Russia against civilians and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine had triggered Europe's worst displacement crisis since the Second World War, and the rapid scaling up and delivery of support by UNHCR to affected groups was welcome, as were its tireless effort to assist the record numbers of displaced persons globally and its leadership in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees and in the Global Protection Cluster.

64. The best possible use must be made of the resources of UNHCR to ensure its continued support for displaced persons around the world, and her Government's contribution of significant unearmarked and multi-year funding would help provide efficient humanitarian interventions where there was greatest need. Sweden had received 6,400 refugees in 2021 under its resettlement programme, and it planned to resettle 5,000 refugees from UNHCR priority regions in 2022. While it held the presidency of the European Union, her Government would promote the establishment of a robust common asylum system to ensure a more even distribution of responsibility for refugees.

65. **Mr. Czech** (Poland) said that recent missile attacks on civilians in residential areas of Ukraine constituted flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. He acknowledged the bravery of Ukrainian refugees, who had been forced to flee from their households and were struggling to provide care in foreign countries for children, older persons and persons in poor health. Poland had taken steps from the outset of the unjustified invasion of Ukraine to deliver humanitarian aid, including to internally displaced persons in Ukraine, to facilitate the transfer of international humanitarian aid through its borders and to host large numbers

of Ukrainian refugees. The Polish Government had enabled over 1.4 million Ukrainian citizens to acquire Polish identity cards and to enjoy the same public services as Polish citizens. In addition, about half a million refugees had obtained employment in Poland since mid-March 2022. A total of about 3.5 million Ukrainian citizens were currently residing in Poland.

66. The vast majority of Polish citizens provided assistance to Ukrainian refugees, such as financial and material support, voluntary activities and accommodation. The Government Strategic Reserves Agency had provided aid amounting to more than €190 million in the form of food assistance, medical supplies, logistical and information technology support, and organization of reception centres. In addition, Poland had allocated about €2.5 million in 2022 to humanitarian projects delivered by Polish non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mainly in Ukraine and in cooperation with Ukrainian partners, in the areas of food, health, shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene, logistics and financial aid.

67. As almost 80 per cent of Ukrainian refugees were reportedly unwilling to return, they were likely to remain in Poland for an extended period. The scale and form of assistance afforded to refugees had evolved. For instance, the State was taking significant steps to promote the inclusion and education of Ukrainian children and teenagers, many of whom had been unaccompanied on their arrival. The final stage of full inclusion and integration of Ukrainians into Polish society would require more vigorous action to ensure social cohesion. Given the growing number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine, Poland was highly concerned about another possible wave of refugees in the winter of 2022.

68. UNHCR remained one of his country's strategic partners. Poland had contributed in 2022 to UNHCR activities in the Republic of Moldova, the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, it had contributed €1 million to the World Food Programme in a display of solidarity with African countries suffering from the food crisis caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

69. **Mr. Rasmussen** (Denmark) said that the number of forcibly displaced people throughout the world had exceeded 100 million in 2022. Denmark was deeply concerned about the growing crisis, which had been fuelled by multiple factors, including the unlawful Russian war in Ukraine. Russian attacks in recent days, which had claimed civilian lives and targeted civilian infrastructure, constituted violations of international humanitarian law.

70. Denmark had been one of the top donors to UNHCR for years and encouraged it to continue expanding its commendable efforts to mobilize private partnerships and funding. Denmark also encouraged other private and public donors to provide quality funding.

71. As the current Chair of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, Denmark welcomed the steadfast commitment of UNHCR to such action and its application of an age, gender and diversity approach in all interventions. Denmark also commended the increased strategic focus of UNHCR on climate action and adaptation. The integrity and accountability of UNHCR was of the utmost importance both to donors and to the beneficiaries of its work. Denmark welcomed its efforts to combat all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and encouraged the Office and its partners to continue promoting a victim-centred approach in that regard.

72. **Mr. Adjoumani** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the number of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons continued to grow as a result of armed conflicts, sociopolitical crises, terrorism and the adverse impact of climate change. The situation had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had greatly reduced States' financial resources and undermined their health systems.

73. Africa was unfortunately paying the heaviest price in terms of forced displacement. It would account for about 59 million of the more than 100 million persons who would be displaced throughout the world in 2022.

74. In line with its tradition of hospitality, Côte d'Ivoire continued to provide aid and protection to thousands of refugees of different nationalities with UNHCR support. It called for international solidarity to enable UNHCR to respond effectively to the needs of populations in distress and encouraged UNHCR to pursue its strategy of seeking durable solutions through voluntary repatriation or local integration.

75. Referring to the invocation of the cessation clause on the status of Ivorian refugees on 30 June 2022, he welcomed the return of almost all refugees to Côte d'Ivoire. Its invocation bore witness to the international recognition of the action taken by the Ivorian authorities with continuous UNHCR support. The Ivorian Government would continue to issue civil status documents to Ivorian refugees who had opted for local integration and to bolster the legal framework for the protection of stateless persons, in line with the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.

76. **Ms. Kauppi** (Finland) said that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine had highlighted the invaluable role played by UNHCR and other organizations in promoting humanitarian principles, including the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors, throughout the world. Finland strongly condemned the missile strikes by Russia against civilians in Ukraine. Indiscriminate targeting of civilians was a war crime.

77. The number of forcibly displaced persons throughout the world currently exceeded 100 million. Finland commended UNHCR for its delivery of aid in challenging environments and was grateful to host countries and communities for their assistance to persons in greatest need. Her country had added budgetary allocations for Ukraine to its support for situations in other parts of the world.

78. Finland was committed to supporting refugees from Ukraine and had provided temporary protection for over 40,000 persons. Given the global increase in resettlement needs, Finland had provided for an increase to 1,500 in the number of refugees to be received under its 2022 resettlement programme. It encouraged more countries to participate in resettlement. Finland was also committed to promoting the integration, employment, education and inclusion of refugees. It was important, with that end in view, to promote cooperation between authorities, municipalities, NGOs and various other stakeholders, including local residents with a refugee background and community volunteers.

79. Finland promoted non-discrimination and gender equality and supported the rights of vulnerable persons and groups. It therefore commended UNHCR for ensuring age, gender and diversity responsiveness throughout its operations and for ensuring that gender parity, racial equality, disability, age, sexual orientation and gender identity were given due consideration in its human resources policy.

80. Finland accorded high priority to disability inclusion, since persons with disabilities were often the most vulnerable during conflicts and catastrophes, and women and children with disabilities could face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. It therefore welcomed the progress made by UNHCR in disability inclusion and hoped that it would be mainstreamed at country level in terms of reported activities and expenditure. As Finland believed that non-earmarked funding would enable UNHCR to respond swiftly to crises, it intended to provide it with additional funds during 2022. Finland also encouraged other countries to support UNHCR.

81. **Mr. Macieira** (Portugal) said that a growing number of people were leaving their homes and seeking protection elsewhere due to conflicts, climate change and food insecurity. There had been a historic increase in refugees and forcibly displaced persons, including in Europe, where millions continued to flee from the unjustified invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which was causing humanitarian crises around the world. As a global response based on international solidarity was the only possible means of tackling the problem, the Global Compact on Refugees and the second Global Refugee Forum to be held in 2023 were increasingly relevant.

82. Portugal had been participating since 2015 in resettlement programmes, working closely with UNHCR. Resettlement and integration had been conducted by the Government in partnership with international organizations, local authorities, public and private entities, and civil society. Temporary protection had been granted since February 2022 to almost 53,000 people of all nationalities fleeing from the war in Ukraine, of whom 42,000 were Ukrainians.

83. As in other humanitarian crises, Portugal was ready to welcome persons in need of international protection. Following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, 884 Afghan citizens had arrived in the country and applied for international protection. Portugal

had also admitted some 650 people from vulnerable groups. In addition, 283 unaccompanied minors from refugee camps on Greek islands had arrived in the country to benefit from programmes for integration into schools and society. Portugal would continue to accept its share of responsibility in the relocation programmes and to participate in rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

84. Portugal was committed to creating opportunities for forcibly displaced persons to gain access to higher education. It was therefore an active partner in the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways, contributed to the Sustainable Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Initiative, and supported the Global Platform for Higher Education in Emergencies, which was a scholarship programme that enabled students from countries in conflict to continue their education, to become fully integrated into the country and to contribute to local communities. Portugal looked forward to the adoption by consensus of the Executive Committee's conclusions on mental health and psychosocial support, since the topic was of the utmost importance and relevance in a humanitarian context.

85. **Mr. Labo** (Niger) said that the people of the Sahel region were experiencing an unprecedented security and humanitarian situation. The global crisis of refugees and forcibly displaced persons and the widespread human rights violations related to terrorism and transnational organized crime presented a major challenge for States, international organizations and other stakeholders. The Niger was determined to assume its share of responsibility in that regard.

86. Due to its geographical location, the Niger was directly affected by the crises in the Sahel, around Lake Chad and in areas to the south of its borders, which had led over the years to the arrival of almost 300,000 refugees and to the displacement of almost 350,000 people within the country. In addition, droughts and floods had deprived hundreds of thousands of people of shelter and means of subsistence, frequently forcing them to leave their homes.

87. The Niger had nonetheless maintained an open-door policy, providing asylum-seekers with access to the country. The challenge of providing a large number of people with assistance and protection had been exacerbated by the prolonged stay of refugees in hosting areas, which entailed large-scale social, health-care and security costs, and the large flows of transit migrants heading to Europe. The Niger thus planned, in consultation with UNHCR and other stakeholders, to implement innovative care projects on behalf of refugees and hosting communities involving, in particular, integration into the local society.

88. The Government was implementing a voluntary return and support policy for internally displaced persons. In addition, consultations were being conducted between the Nigerian authorities, the authorities of the Niger and UNHCR on the voluntary return of Nigerian refugees to their country.

89. The Niger continued to receive refugees and asylum-seekers from Libya through the emergency transit mechanism established pursuant to a memorandum of understanding signed with UNHCR in 2018. As of 31 July 2022, a total of 4,607 persons had been resettled from the Niger to third countries, including 3,425 refugees who had been evacuated from Libya by means of the mechanism.

90. In line with the commitments undertaken at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the Niger had launched a review of its legal framework to guarantee the effectiveness of its asylum system, had periodically renewed the emergency transit mechanism, and had implemented the urbanization programme for refugee reception sites. It looked forward to participating in the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

91. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Niger was located in a critical geographical zone afflicted by conflicts and the impact of climate change. The country nonetheless played an exemplary role in hosting refugees from Nigeria, Mali and other neighbouring countries and in managing complex issues of internally displaced persons. UNHCR required more resources to continue providing humanitarian aid in the central Sahel region, where it faced major budgetary constraints. It would continue to collaborate with the Government of the Niger in identifying solutions for internally displaced persons and refugees.

92. He greatly appreciated the collaboration on refugee issues between Côte d'Ivoire as a country of origin, West African States as host countries and UNHCR, which had led after many years of dialogue to the return of the majority of refugees to Côte d'Ivoire or to their integration into host countries.

93. Sweden was one of the largest donors of unearmarked contributions to UNHCR, which enabled his Office to implement operations that were poorly funded. UNHCR was aware of the political transition in the country and trusted that the new Government would commit itself to continuous action, internationally and domestically, in all areas that had been appreciated in recent years.

94. He hoped that Denmark, following the forthcoming elections, would continue to provide substantial financial contributions to UNHCR. He was confident that UNHCR would continue to engage constructively with the country on matters related to asylum in Europe and Denmark.

95. He was well aware of the extraordinary role played by Poland in hosting Ukrainian refugees. In addition, he appreciated the country's support for refugee food security through its contributions to the World Food Programme.

96. He welcomed the commitment by Finland to the provision of additional financial support for UNHCR during the current year, given that a sum of \$700 million was required to prevent any major cuts in expenditure. The increase by Finland in the resettlement quota was also highly significant.

97. UNHCR was making every effort to playing a leading role in coordination matters within the United Nations system, including the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund and many other organizations. Such action reduced the cost of operations and was therefore important for all stakeholders, including donors and host countries.

98. He appreciated the temporary protection provided by Portugal for Ukrainians and people of other nationalities who had left Ukraine. He was also grateful for its support for resettlement, its action on behalf of Afghan refugees, its relocation of refugees from Greece and other locations, and its support for the education pathways.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.