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Summary record of the 746th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 10 October 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Baddoura (Lebanon)

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

Opening of the session, adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters
(A/AC.96/LXXIII/1)

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventy-third session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

2. He said that there were now more than 100 million persons around the world who had been displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations. That was an increase of 18 million since the previous session of the Executive Committee. It was also significantly more than double the number of displaced persons a decade previously in 2012. The Executive Committee continued to play a key role in helping the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) address the enormous challenges presented by that scenario. He had seen at first hand the important work UNHCR and its partners were doing, notably during his field visit to Uganda in May. He had been moved by the plight of the refugees he had met there and impressed by the progressive manner in which Uganda was managing the refugee situation.

3. *The agenda was adopted.*

A short film entitled "The future depends on us" was projected.

Statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

4. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it was unfortunate that the international community had become quite unable to work together, whether to make peace, to prevent predictable catastrophes, to share vaccines or to reduce risks from the climate emergency.

5. The impact of such inaction on the world's most vulnerable people was grave. Recurrent crises were causing ever more hardship and compelling people to flee. The demand for solutions from UNHCR had never been greater, yet its space for finding those solutions had never been smaller.

6. The longer term consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continued to have an impact on the most vulnerable, including refugees and displaced people, while the climate emergency was increasingly driving displacement. The clear link between climate change and displacement was illustrated in the Horn of Africa, where more than 1 million people had been displaced since January 2021 by a combination of conflict and drought. Around 80 per cent of refugees were from countries affected by the climate emergency, while some 90 per cent of recent returnees had gone back to situations with a high degree of climate vulnerability. What was the future of people he had met in countries like Cameroon, who saw their lives and livelihoods evaporate like the lakes that had nourished their families for generations? Refugees and displaced people had an enormous stake in ensuring that bold climate action was taken but they were too often forgotten in the discussion.

7. UNHCR continued to step up its own climate response in many ways, but clearly more needed to be done. Countries of origin and host communities must be able to have direct access to climate finance, including the \$100 billion annual commitment for climate action. Adaptation and preparedness plans must include the displaced, whose plight Member States should take into consideration at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

8. Global inflationary pressures were also having a severe effect on the most vulnerable. The spread of poverty and food insecurity, often combined with conflict, violence and discrimination, yielded a toxic mix that left people with little hope for the future. Both refugees and their hosts were taking desperate measures. Recently, more than 100 people had drowned when a boat with Lebanese citizens along with Syrian and Palestinian refugees had capsized in the Mediterranean, adding to the estimated 1,630 who had lost their lives just in the current year trying to reach Europe by sea.

9. While UNHCR could not influence global macroeconomic trends, it was doing what it could to alleviate hardship and provide opportunities. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had been asked to take account of forced displacement as a factor in planning support to States, and progress had been made with the World Bank, bilateral donors, regional banks and other financial institutions in providing support to refugee-hosting countries that were including refugees in their national plans. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated that about \$3.3 billion of bilateral development funds were injected into refugee situations each year. That was in addition to some \$2 billion per year from multilateral development banks and humanitarian resources mobilized by UNHCR and its partners. That must continue and grow, especially in the form of grants to support host countries and communities that bore a disproportionate amount of the international community's responsibility for refugees.

10. Other means of mitigating the cost of living crisis for the displaced and host communities included cash assistance, delivery of relief items and mental health support. Some interventions reflected the big leaps that UNHCR had made in the use of data and analysis thanks to its cooperation with the World Bank through the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement.

11. Conflict was nevertheless still the biggest driver of forced displacement, as exemplified in recent months by countries such as Myanmar and Burkina Faso and regions such as the Sahel, where instability was displacing people not only within their countries but beyond, including to coastal States, North Africa and Europe. Despite its stretched capacity, UNHCR had responded to each of the 37 emergencies declared in the past 12 months, whether caused by conflict, climate or often a combination of both – as for example in Mozambique, where 125,000 people had been freshly displaced.

12. The Russian invasion of Ukraine had precipitated the largest and fastest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. He commended European Union member States and other States in Europe, which had displayed exceptional leadership and cooperation. UNHCR itself was active wherever Ukrainians had been displaced and indeed in countries around the world, including the Russian Federation. It had developed innovative responses, for example through the extensive network of safe spaces known as Blue Dots – developed in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and local authorities – where refugees, including those with specific needs, such as separated children and women at risk from gender-based violence, could obtain help and protection. UNHCR worked with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and authorities to counter trafficking. It also provided cash assistance to vulnerable refugees: cash was often the lifeline needed to rent an apartment, reach family or friends, or to have some resources available to reject the advances of those with criminal intentions; it was not charity, but protection.

13. In Ukraine itself at least 6.2 million people were internally displaced and many more needed humanitarian support. He wished to praise the able leadership of the Ukrainian Government in the humanitarian response. UNHCR had focused on protection, shelter, and cash assistance but, with winter looming, millions of Ukrainians, especially older persons and persons with disabilities, were counting on the entire international community to redouble their efforts.

14. The outflow of people from Ukraine had prompted an extraordinary response, one example being the generosity shown by the Republic of Moldova despite facing challenges of its own, and by private individuals and companies, which accounted for more than half the contributions. The Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof (Temporary Protection Directive) had enabled millions of Ukrainians to find safety without putting pressure on asylum systems.

15. The crisis had debunked many of the myths propagated over the years by some politicians, such as that Europe was "full". Having been unable, the year before, to deal with

a few dozen people in a boat, Europe had suddenly found it could take in 7 million. Temporary protection had proved a very effective tool to receive and include refugees.

16. That did not mean that everyone had a right to go wherever they wished. Temporary protection could not apply to all and complex situations posed major challenges. In addition, public trust and confidence in the management of asylum had suffered. However, UNHCR was ready to support States in rebuilding that confidence with fair and fast asylum processes that permitted both protection for those who needed it and dignified return for those who did not. It was developing new ideas for ensuring access to territory, international protection and adherence to refugee and human rights law, while finding practical ways to address the complexity of contemporary flows.

17. He believed that simplistic calls by politicians to deny asylum-seekers access to territory by building walls or through violent pushback must be resisted. He was opposed to States' evasion of responsibility by outsourcing their asylum obligations. He rejected the discourse of some European politicians who claimed that Ukrainians were "real refugees" while others – fleeing similar horrors, but from different parts of the world – were not: it could only be described as racist. Moreover, it was insulting to the host countries around the world that for years had shouldered their responsibility by providing protection and support to millions.

18. The conflict in Ukraine was also affecting contributions to UNHCR. It was true that support from the general public, private companies, and foundations since 2019 had steadily increased, from \$421 million to a projected \$1 billion in 2022, and that, in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees, private companies had contributed with their innovation and expertise and also by hiring refugees. Moreover, as member States had urged, UNHCR had reached out to new donors, including in the area of Islamic philanthropy, for example through an agreement with the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development and the Islamic Development Bank to launch the first Global Islamic Fund for Refugees to support its operations.

19. He was nevertheless worried about his Office's financial situation. Private contributions were not as predictable as those of States and the goodwill of individuals or companies could not form the bedrock for its operations. As a United Nations body, created by Member States with a specific mandate, UNHCR looked to Member States for support.

20. The response by traditional donors was still strong and had been led by exceptional levels of financing from the United States of America, followed by Germany. But the Ukraine emergency had added over \$1 billion to the current year's budget, bringing it to a total of \$10.7 billion.

21. He appreciated the very real pressure on donor budgets and the hardship confronting citizens and taxpayers, but funding for new emergencies like Ukraine needed to be in addition to, not instead of, funding for other situations. In relation to Ukraine, most had made their overall contributions additional but, for other specific contributions to UNHCR, additionality was not always visible.

22. He therefore appealed to all donors to do more to support UNHCR and refugees around the world. Without an additional \$700 million by the end of 2022, severe cuts would be needed, with negative and sometimes dramatic consequences for refugees and host communities. He also wished to remind donors of the importance of multi-year and unearmarked funding. He thanked Sweden and Norway for their continued lead in that regard. Just 12 per cent of income from Governments was unearmarked, hampering the management of expenditure and effective response to new emergencies.

23. It was vital to maintain focus on all crises, not just on the latest one at the expense of the rest. All responses needed to be adequately resourced, or refugees and their hosts would be doomed to further hardship, loss of hope and the risk of onward movement.

24. The current focus, for example, was on Ukraine but in Afghanistan – the focus in 2021 – millions, including women, girls, and minorities, still needed urgent help inside the country and in neighbouring Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Funding for operations in Ethiopia – the focus before Afghanistan – now stood at just 46 per cent in a deteriorating context of renewed conflict. After strong support following the initial displacement of

Rohingya refugees, the 2021 joint response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis had been 72 per cent funded but now stood at just 30 per cent: dramatic cuts loomed there.

25. In Uganda, which hosted over 1.5 million refugees and had very generous refugee policies, UNHCR faced a huge financial gap and was struggling to help the 110,000 Congolese and South Sudanese refugees who had arrived during the course of the current year alone. In the Sahel, where people were subjected to extreme violence, including gender-based violence, as well as the climate emergency, the funding shortfall was compromising UNHCR efforts to provide shelter and protection.

26. As to the millions of Syrian refugees and displaced persons – about the same number as displaced Ukrainians – funding constraints were hampering his Office's efforts to remove the obstacles to return and limiting its humanitarian and early recovery response within the framework of Security Council resolution 2642 (2022) on the situation in the Middle East. At the same time, funding for the refugee response in neighbouring countries was at its lowest level ever, while host communities were also suffering the effects of the economic downturn, especially in Lebanon. He wished to recall that Lebanon and Jordan hosted the world's highest percentage of refugees per capita and Türkiye was still the largest host country. The situation was untenable. Adequate funding must be ensured in host countries and there must be a renewed focus on resolving more than 11 years of Syrian displacement.

27. Efforts must also include searching for solutions. In some places, that might mean supporting countries of origin as well as to make it happen. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, where civil war had forced hundreds of thousands of citizens into exile, leaders had worked towards peace, with international support, with the result that the countries of the region that had protected and helped Ivorian refugees had applied the cessation clause; 96 per cent of the refugees had now returned home, while those who had chosen to stay abroad were being regularized by host countries. Refugees had also returned to the Sudan and South Sudan, despite the challenges they faced.

28. Visiting Tanzania, he had seen potential for solutions for Burundian refugees, although he was gravely concerned about the violent and fragile situation in the subregion: in 2022, 150,000 people within and from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been displaced, for example, in a context of unimaginable violence, especially against women.

29. In the Americas, he was grateful to countries such as Colombia and Ecuador, which had hosted and regularized Venezuelan refugees and migrants. He looked forward to renewed dialogue with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to address the underlying causes of movements from that country. The quest for solutions in that region generally was exemplified by the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS) and would, he hoped, be buoyed by the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection.

30. As to internally displaced persons, now that the Secretary-General had set out principles and approaches in his Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, concrete work could begin, starting from countries where solutions might be at hand.

31. Statelessness had by no means been eradicated, although progress was being made. The Philippines had acceded to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness; Liberia had removed gender-discriminatory provisions from its nationality law; Albania, the Netherlands and Turkmenistan had established statelessness determination procedures; and a total of 81,000 formerly stateless people had been granted nationality in 2021. He appealed to all States to take appropriate action before the end of the I Belong campaign to end statelessness by 2024.

32. Individual capacity building was also important and he urged Member States to follow through on the conclusions of the General Assembly's recent Transforming Education Summit, particularly with regard to investing in educational opportunities for refugees.

33. Given the importance of third-country solutions, he was heartened by the return of the United States to the top of the table for resettlement places; he was grateful to Canada and Sweden for their lead and to Norway and Finland for receiving emergency resettlement cases, a gesture that had saved many lives. Globally, the number of resettled refugees had increased, with 76,500 submissions already in the current year, and he encouraged countries with the means to do so to expand resettlement.

34. UNHCR was aware of the need to continuously improve its own effectiveness, efficiency, and fairness. Progress had been made with the transformation process launched in 2016. Recruitment had been delegated and multi-year planning extended to more operations. Workday, the new human resource management system soon to be launched, would facilitate processes, with all data centralized and interoperable in the cloud.

35. The overhaul and simplification of partnership management processes, which accounted for \$1.4 billion of annual expenditure, would help the Office to expand partnerships with national NGOs and refugee-led organizations. The new results-based monitoring system known as COMPASS was helping with medium- and long-term planning to ensure lasting and transformative results. The Office's innovative fleet-management system, developed with the World Food Programme and now available to all agencies, was saving money and miles and reducing the collective carbon footprint.

36. The eradication of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, and the attainment of gender parity and geographic and racial diversity throughout the organization, remained priorities. The Office had also continued to strengthen risk management, investigation capacity and oversight and implemented an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for issues falling more in the realm of management than misconduct.

37. Those reforms were not yet complete. He was grateful to Member States for accepting the Secretary-General's proposal to extend his mandate to the end of 2025. He was encouraged by Member States' support and humbled and gratified by their trust. He took it as an endorsement of what he often heard from States, partners and, most importantly, refugees: that UNHCR was not just relevant, but effective; that his colleagues were committed and caring; and that, no matter the challenge, they delivered for those they served, alongside their State and civil society partners.

38. Much had been achieved in the four years since Member States had affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees. In many situations there was now a "whole of society" response that included citizens, companies, academics, the sporting community, religious actors and others in the service of refugees and their hosts. The 2019 Global Refugee Forum had been a success.

39. There was still a long way to go. The second Forum would take place in just over a year. He was grateful to Switzerland for agreeing to co-host the event and was pleased to announce that Colombia, France, Japan, Jordan, the Niger and Uganda were to co-convene the meeting alongside UNHCR. He thanked the outgoing co-convenors Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Germany, Pakistan and Türkiye for their follow-up on pledge implementation. He called on Member States to make progress in the next 14 months, to make good on the pledges made at the last Forum and prepare the ground for more pledges at the next.

General debate

40. **Mr. Ahmad** (Chad), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the upward trend in forced movements around the world in general, and in Africa in particular, was extremely worrying. According to the most recent UNHCR data, there were more than 100 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, as compared to an estimated 89.3 million at the end of 2021. Forced displacement continued to pose a formidable challenge in Africa, where development gains had been undermined by protracted displacement situations and new and complex humanitarian emergencies. Such situations had caused humanitarian needs to grow exponentially over the years, particularly in the most vulnerable communities.

41. The scale of forced displacement and statelessness in Africa required strong collective action, multi-stakeholder partnerships and close consultation with affected populations. The Group therefore welcomed initiatives undertaken by intergovernmental organizations and the private sector to address the needs of forcibly displaced persons. Recognizing that solutions could be found only through political will and cooperation, and strong multilateral partnerships, the Group also welcomed national, bilateral and regional initiatives to address the root causes of forced displacement in Africa. The timely and relevant recommendations made at the Extraordinary Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference held in Malabo in May 2022 demonstrated a political will and determination to find durable solutions.

42. The strengthened international cooperation and multi-stakeholder commitment to finding solutions to forced displacement provided for in the Global Compact on Refugees constituted a solid framework for more predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. The Group of African States therefore welcomed the progress made under the compact, including increased official development assistance for developing countries and partnerships to implement policy measures to alleviate poverty and create durable solutions.

43. While encouraging members of the international community to continue to increase their burden- and responsibility-sharing commitments in line with the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum, the Group of African States called for the effective implementation of the Secretary-General's "The highest aspiration: a call to action for human rights" and of his report entitled "Our Common Agenda", which would promote the rights of stateless persons, refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons.

44. The number of people displaced within their own country because of conflict, violence, disasters or climate change had been rising steadily, reaching a record high at the end of 2021. Africa was in an unprecedented situation in terms of internal displacement. An estimated 4.3 million people had been newly displaced on the continent as a result of disasters related primarily to climate change. Nevertheless, the Group of African States welcomed the commitment of UNHCR to the global response to internal displacement in cooperation with States, to support national actions, and with regional multilateral development banks, to ensure that situations of internal displacement were taken into account in their policy and programme development. The Group also appreciated the assistance provided by UNHCR to Governments in developing appropriate legal and policy frameworks for the protection of internally displaced persons in the context of disasters and climate change.

45. The Group of African States called on the international community to redouble its efforts to share responsibility and find durable solutions to reverse the current trend and significantly reduce the levels of internal displacement in Africa. Moreover, it encouraged stakeholders to effectively implement the commitments contained in the Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Internal Displacement.

46. In conclusion, the Group of African States reiterated its support for UNHCR, reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism and increased international cooperation and called for greater involvement of development actors in displacement situations through the promotion of strong, reliable and complementary partnerships with multilateral development banks and bilateral actors.

47. **Mr. Wagner** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia and Ukraine, and the potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, said that the European Union and its member States were deeply concerned that the rate of displacement continued to considerably outpace solutions for both refugees and internally displaced persons. The European Union was pleased that Mr. Grandi would remain at the helm of UNHCR and wished to reassure him of its support. It also wished to reiterate its gratitude to Governments and communities that had taken in forcibly displaced persons.

48. The unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation had triggered the worst displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Over 6 million people were currently internally displaced in Ukraine and millions more had fled the country. The European Union and its member States had reacted immediately by activating the Temporary Protection Directive for the first time. To date, some 4 million people had registered for temporary protection in European Union member States, which gave them access to essential services, the labour market, suitable accommodation, social welfare assistance, medical care and education. The European Union and its member States were working closely with UNHCR and other international partners to prevent human trafficking and protect women and children. They condemned, in the strongest possible terms, the war of aggression against Ukraine and the illegal annexation of eastern regions of the country. By wilfully undermining the rules-based international order and blatantly violating the fundamental rights of Ukraine to independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Russian Federation was putting global security at risk.

49. The European Union and its member States were deeply concerned over the impact of the war, particularly on already fragile countries, including those hosting a significant number of refugees and other persons of concern. The European Union and its member States had quickly mobilized and remained fully engaged in addressing and mitigating the global consequences of the war. In May, they had committed to working with all international partners on a response to the global food crisis. As part of that commitment, they had identified an overall contribution of more than €5 billion in humanitarian and development assistance for global food security over the period 2021–2024. Almost 20 per cent of the annual humanitarian aid budget of the European Union was dedicated to emergency food assistance and nutrition.

50. The European Union and its member States were committed to greater burden- and responsibility-sharing for refugees globally and to addressing the root causes of forced displacement. Together with its member States, the European Union continued to be a leading donor in support of responses to major refugee crises and sought to bring together humanitarian and development efforts in line with its policy on forced displacement.

51. The right to seek and enjoy asylum and the principle of non-refoulement remained at the heart of European law, policy and action. In 2021, over 500,000 asylum-seekers had applied for international protection in the European Union, and since 2015, resettlement programmes had helped more than 100,000 refugees to find shelter there.

52. Access to health care, especially mental health care, for forcibly displaced and stateless persons remained a significant challenge in many parts of the world. It was therefore appropriate that the Executive Committee's conclusions that year focused on mental health and psychosocial support.

53. The first Global Refugee Forum had been an important milestone in bringing together a wider group of stakeholders dedicated to the refugee cause and had fostered more proactive engagement with development actors and international financial institutions. That new form of partnership was necessary to meet the growing challenges of forced displacement. It was therefore welcome that the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, to be held in December 2022, would be dedicated to the topic of development cooperation. The Dialogue would also mark an important step towards the second Global Refugee Forum in 2023.

54. The European Union and its member States encouraged UNHCR to work with stakeholders to keep the pledging process efficient, simple and transparent, building on the progress made in previous years, and supported the participation of refugees and refugee-led organizations in such global events. They appreciated the continued efforts of UNHCR to carry out internal reform, especially through the Business Transformation Programme, and to strengthen its strategic planning, integrity and oversight functions and promote risk management and results-based programming. They encouraged UNHCR to provide regular updates on its progress and on challenges and to pursue its work to broaden its donor base. The European Union and its member States remained strong supporters of the work and mandate of UNHCR, politically as well as financially, and could continue to be counted on as solid partners.

55. **Mr. Gamaleldin** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that the Group wished to congratulate Mr. Grandi on the renewal of his mandate. It was deeply concerned by the rising number of refugees and internally displaced persons around the world, 83 per cent of whom were hosted by developing countries. Despite the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis that the world had been experiencing in 2022, Arab States had continued to host and protect refugees in accordance with international law.

56. Protracted crises in and around the Arab region had caused more than 17 million people to fall within the mandate of UNHCR and had forced Arab States to assume huge responsibilities with serious economic, social and political implications. The Group was deeply concerned by the widening gap between the budget required to implement UNHCR programmes and the resources available. It reaffirmed the need for focused international efforts to ease the burden on host countries and achieve a fair and sustainable sharing of burdens and responsibilities. The severe lack of funding for UNHCR programmes in the Arab

region reflected negatively on the organization's ability to protect refugees and displaced persons there and affected the resilience of host communities. Nevertheless, countries in the region continued to host refugees and provide them with basic services, including education for children and assistance and protection for women and girls. They also continued to cooperate with UNHCR to support job creation and entrepreneurship.

57. Arab States continued to make voluntary contributions and would not hesitate to support the efforts of UNHCR, given their belief in the importance of strengthening joint international action. The Group called on the international community to increase funding, in particular unearmarked contributions, for UNHCR programmes and activities. In that connection, it reiterated its concern about the deterioration of the global humanitarian situation and wished to stress the need to respond to protracted crises in a fair and sustainable manner.

58. In future, it was important for UNHCR to refrain from engaging with controversial topics, as doing so could have a negative impact on its humanitarian activities. The Group wished to reaffirm the importance of providing health care to all refugees and looked forward to the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. It was concerned about the continued decline in voluntary repatriation rates, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region, and noted that, in the proposed programme budget for 2023, a smaller proportion of funding was allocated to promoting voluntary return in the region. The Group called on the international community to shoulder its responsibility to increase opportunities for refugee resettlement. There was a need to address challenges to the safe return of refugees and the root causes of refugee crises, including by finding peaceful settlements to all conflicts in the region, eliminating terrorism, tackling the causes of instability and strengthening cooperation in the fields of humanitarian action, development and peace and security.

59. **Mr. Castillero Correa** (Observer for Panama), speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that the Group wished to express its appreciation for the leadership shown by UNHCR during a period in which the international community's capacity to respond to common challenges had been transformed. The Group congratulated Mr. Grandi on the extension of his mandate, which came at a crucial time for it to continue strengthening its joint work with UNHCR for the benefit of refugees and host communities. The Group was convinced that solidarity and respect for human rights were cornerstones of collective efforts to protect people who had been forced to leave their communities and that those people were not a burden, but a responsibility shared by all.

60. According to UNHCR data, the number of forcibly displaced persons in the world was steadily increasing. Latin America and the Caribbean was one of the regions most affected by the situation, particularly in 2022, as a result of the creation of new migration routes. The Group was convinced that growing challenges could be met only through coordination and the harmonization of universal and regional protection systems and national efforts. It therefore wished to stress the importance of dialogue, sustainable international cooperation and shared responsibility in finding answers to enable the continued provision of assistance and support in the region while moving towards the achievement of durable solutions.

61. Although the speed and scale of forced displacement continued to exceed available solutions, the data provided by UNHCR also offered glimmers of hope. In 2021, voluntary returns of refugees and internally displaced persons had returned to pre-COVID-19 levels and voluntary repatriation had increased by 71 per cent.

62. Latin America and the Caribbean stood out for its historical solidarity with, and openness towards, people in need of international protection. Such a humanitarian vocation was reflected in cooperation between regional and subregional mechanisms, which facilitated dialogue under a shared-responsibility approach. Efforts to regularize the situation of such people, provide them with protection and integrate them were examples of good practices in the region, yet required greater support from the international community.

63. The Group wished to reaffirm States' obligation to respect the principle of non-discrimination and adopt measures to combat and eliminate all forms of racism and xenophobia. Countries in the region had worked to promote the socioeconomic integration

of persons recognized as refugees through programmes that provided them with access to education, health care, the labour market and other basic services.

64. The Group recognized the efforts of UNHCR to meet operational needs and increase the budget in the Americas region. However, in view of current challenges, the resources allocated remained insufficient and accounted for only a small percentage of the total UNHCR budget. The Group therefore called for a budgetary review to reflect the true scale of the region's multiple and growing needs in the field. It supported opportunities for exchange among Member States, such as the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, which would focus on development cooperation as a tool to promote protection, inclusion and solutions for displaced and stateless persons. It was important to reflect on lessons learned from specific contexts of displacement and statelessness, generate recommendations and find new opportunities to strengthen development cooperation. The outcome of the Dialogue would help to follow up on pledges and mobilize development cooperation ahead of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, where the theme of development would serve as the main basis for charting the international community's efforts to develop a strategy for refugees and host communities.

65. The joint work of international organizations, governments and NGOs contributed to the achievement of the ambitious objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees by strengthening sincere, balanced and effective international cooperation. The unwavering support of UNHCR and the United Nations in general would continue to be imperative to bolster national capacities and achieve the international community's goals in a more sustainable manner.

66. The private sector, academia, civil society and non-governmental non-profit organizations played an essential role in addressing global displacement. Despite the challenges, particularly over the previous two years, there had been an admirable level of cooperation within the humanitarian system. The Group was especially grateful to donors who continued to contribute, despite the pressures of the global crisis.

67. With less than a decade to go to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the challenges faced by the international community were daunting, especially in developing countries. Any proposal should thus be part of a comprehensive strategy to find durable solutions before 2030. It was time for the international community to intensify its efforts to promote collaborative management while putting people at the heart of the agenda.

68. **Mr. Bessler** (Switzerland) said that, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international community was facing new challenges. War had returned to Europe, in Ukraine, with all the harm it brought to the populations concerned. Reports were being received of attacks on civilian infrastructure in various cities, including a playground in Kyiv. Switzerland condemned such attacks in the strongest possible terms. It urged all parties concerned to fully respect refugee law and international humanitarian law and to support the work of humanitarian organizations. It also called for greater commitment against gender-based violence and, more generally, for better protection of persons of concern to UNHCR.

69. Switzerland wished to acknowledge the efforts of UNHCR, its teams at headquarters and in the field, and its partners in the context of the conflict in Ukraine. The speed of the reception procedures in many countries had been exemplary and deserved to be documented in order to better prepare for future crises. Switzerland had contributed by granting temporary protection status to more than 64,000 people from Ukraine. However, it was concerned that the extraordinary mobilization might draw attention and support away from other crises, notably in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East. It was essential not to leave anyone behind.

70. As co-host of the second Global Refugee Forum, Switzerland would be fully involved in ensuring that the event marked a historic step in the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. The Forum represented a unique opportunity to foster new multi-stakeholder commitments, achieve more equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing and increase international solidarity towards refugees. In line with its commitments, Switzerland had launched the Geneva Technical Hub, which tested and supported the scaling up of technical innovations to promote energy efficiency and reduced environmental impact; helped to establish the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, which was committed to

addressing the educational needs of children and young persons in situations of emergency, protracted crisis and displacement; restructured its asylum system to offer quicker, more efficient procedures, enabling faster integration in Switzerland; and maintained its resettlement commitments, having already resettled 1,701 of the 3,200 people planned between 2020 and 2023.

71. To conclude, Switzerland wished to express its gratitude for Mr. Grandi's continued leadership of UNHCR and welcomed his re-election. It encouraged UNHCR to pursue its localization agenda, or adapting its humanitarian action to the local context, and support public and private local and national institutions in carrying out their tasks in an increasingly autonomous manner. Only together could the international community achieve full respect for the rights of forcibly displaced men, women and children around the world.

72. **Mr. Moussa Adamo** (Observer for Gabon) said that the Global Compact on Refugees remained a key part of efforts to provide protection and assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants in the face of conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, discrimination, persecution and the climate crisis, all of which increased migration flows. Through its adherence to various international instruments on refugee protection, as well as its adoption of relevant legislation, his Government had prioritized the protection of migrants and refugees, who were fully integrated into Gabonese society. Its activities to promote refugees' well-being focused on durable solutions that addressed their legal and socioeconomic integration, and it therefore reaffirmed its commitment to non-refoulement, safe, humane migration, and cooperation, as illustrated by its joint project with United Nations agencies on adopting a human security approach to mixed movement towards Gabon.

73. Refugees in Gabon benefited from health insurance and biometric passports that afforded them freedom of movement, and migrants and refugees had access to health care on an equal footing with Gabonese nationals. Moreover, work had been undertaken to integrate refugees into the labour market, and refugee children and young persons enjoyed a constitutional right to education and professional training on an equal footing with Gabonese children. Despite the ongoing economic, climate, security and humanitarian crises, his Government would continue to fulfil its international commitments by providing support for refugees and seeking effective solutions at all levels.

74. **Mr. Selaković** (Serbia) said that the extremely high number of refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers worldwide was a tragic consequence of the current global challenges. Serbia was still among the countries in Europe with the largest number of internally displaced persons and was one of the five countries in the world with a protracted displacement crisis. The wars in the 1990s had forced more than a half million Serbs to flee or be expelled from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For decades, the Serbian Government had undertaken efforts to receive and support Serbs forced to leave their ancestral homes and, most importantly, to create conditions for their sustainable return to them, an endeavour that did not always enjoy the cooperation of the other parties involved.

75. The country also faced challenges linked to the internal displacement of more than 200,000 persons from the southern Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija seeking safety and protection from the systemic persecution to which persons of non-Albanian ethnicity have been constantly exposed.

76. His Government was committed to providing care for the approximately 1.5 million migrants who had to date passed through the country towards European countries. The Government was also making a contribution towards the care of persons who had been forced to leave their homes in Ukraine owing to current events and had donated €3 million in aid for Ukraine, of which more than €1 million had been provided to refugees through OHCHR.

77. UNHCR had provided welcome assistance in implementing a housing programme that had provided accommodation for more than 6,500 refugee and displaced families following the conflict in the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, demonstrating that solutions could be found provided that the necessary understanding and will existed. That example should be heeded when seeking a durable solution for the internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, where, 20 years later, the conditions for their sustainable return were lacking and their human and civil rights were not respected; indeed, less than 2

per cent had achieved a sustainable return to their homes in Kosovo and Metohija. The Action Agenda on Internal Displacement should lead to the establishment of a framework for a new approach to protracted internal displacement in Serbia, and his Government supported the Action Agenda's goals of finding durable solutions, preventing crises and ensuring protection and assistance. Finding a durable solution to forced displacement was closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, and the principle of leaving no one behind for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda had been incorporated into the Serbian legislative system.

78. **Mr. Gakosso** (Congo) said that the Congo welcomed many thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers of numerous nationalities, in particular persons fleeing conflict and political instability in neighbouring countries. Recently, his Government had received hundreds of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who had been forced to leave their country and abandon everything because of violence linked to a land dispute with ethnic overtones. His Government had recently adopted legislation on the right to asylum and refugee status that ensured that all refugees and asylum-seekers enjoyed the rights set out in national and international instruments, such as the rights to employment, education and health, on an equal footing with Congolese nationals. The law also allowed for protection and asylum to be granted in places with extraterritorial jurisdiction, such as embassies, and provided for subsidiary protection. Furthermore, the Lisungi Social Safety Nets Project, which had originally provided aid to vulnerable Congolese citizens, had been extended to refugees and asylum-seekers, allowing hundreds of refugee families to benefit from Government funding amounting to almost \$4 million during the COVID-19 pandemic. Owing to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic and worsened by unprecedented inflation as a result of the serious events that were tearing the eastern part of Europe apart – the unfortunate war between Russia and Ukraine – it was increasingly difficult to mobilize the financial resources necessary to manage refugees and respond promptly and appropriately to humanitarian emergencies.

79. **Ms. Valls Noyes** (United States of America) said that she condemned the missile and rocket attacks carried out that day by Russia against civilian targets in Ukraine; such action was inconsistent with international humanitarian law. Increased effectiveness, efficiency and generosity were required in the face of unprecedented global displacement. While there was reason for hope, such as recent pledges on urgent action to avert hunger and famine at the Global Food Security Summit convened by the United States, the humanitarian community was struggling to respond adequately to increasing numbers of crises. Her Government had responded decisively to such crises, including the illegal unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Russia, while maintaining robust humanitarian assistance and diplomatic efforts around the world. In the Sahel, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Venezuela and elsewhere, it was working with UNHCR and other partners to deliver life-saving aid, and advocating for durable solutions.

80. Her Government had provided more than \$17 billion in humanitarian assistance in 2022, and its contribution of \$2.2 billion to the Office that year had been its largest ever. She called on other States to follow her Government's lead in expanding their refugee resettlement programmes. The number of refugees resettled in the United States in 2022 had more than doubled in comparison with 2021, in addition to the arrival of more than 82,000 Afghans forced to flee the Taliban. Her Government had proposed a resettlement diplomacy network in an effort to increase global resettlement capacity, and it had also fulfilled the pledge made at the 2021 high-level officials meeting within the framework of the Global Compact on Refugees to provide support for policies promoting refugee inclusion and self-reliance. Lastly, it had enhanced protection for particularly vulnerable groups and individuals, including people facing food insecurity, women, children, members of the LGBTQI+ community, persons with disabilities and so many others whose identity or circumstances gave rise to increased protection needs.

81. **Ms. Alawee** (United States of America) said that as a former refugee from Iraq, she served on an advisory board comprising formerly displaced persons. Engaging with and recognizing the power of persons with lived experience of displacement would improve humanitarian protection solutions.

82. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he wished to thank the Government of Switzerland for adopting a temporary protection regime for refugees from Ukraine that closely mirrored that of the European Union and for its provision

of additional resources to UNHCR. Despite experiencing significant displacement, the countries of Africa displayed unrivalled generosity and solidarity towards refugees, and the attention of the international community had recently been drawn to the challenges that they faced at an extraordinary summit of the African Union. The temporary protection regime established by the European Union for Ukrainian refugees set an important precedent in Europe and beyond. Displacement was a major consequence of food insecurity, an issue that often went hand-in-hand with conflict.

83. He welcomed the support of Arab States for the work of UNHCR, and he called on them to provide additional contributions. While those States demonstrated a notable willingness to host refugees, solutions to the long-term displacement seen in the region were required. The solidarity among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean was welcome, and he recognized the need to ensure that the region's needs were considered in budgetary allocations; to that end, his Office was working with development banks and financial institutions in all regions with a view to supplementing humanitarian aid.

84. The inclusion-based reception policy adopted by Gabon was commendable, and he welcomed its reference to health insurance for refugees; while the discourse surrounding inclusion was often theoretical, it was practical initiatives like health insurance that made the biggest difference to refugees' lives. It was important to remember that mixed movement did not always flow in the direction of North America and Europe. The Congolese Lisungi Social Safety Nets Project constituted a commendable inclusion policy that other States should consider. Serbia was among the States most affected by increased mixed movement through the Balkans. Although political progress towards addressing the root causes of internal displacement in Serbia would assist in finding a resolution, his Office would nevertheless continue to work with the Government in that regard. Lastly, he wished to reiterate his gratitude for the extraordinary support, particularly in terms of funding, lent to the Office by the United States and for its commitment to increasing resettlement capacity.

85. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that it was imperative to take firm action to ensure a better future for the displaced and most vulnerable persons, including women and children, persons with disabilities, older persons and Indigenous peoples. The Filipino people reaffirmed their active support for the global humanitarian agenda, notwithstanding their serious domestic issues such as energy crises, climate change, disaster-induced internal displacement and a polarized citizenry. The Philippines was a nation of migrants and a safe haven for waves of refugees fleeing persecution.

86. No refugee situation should be ignored and no hosting community should remain underfunded. The Philippines urged donors to explore ways and means of expanding assistance. It was also essential to broaden the base of support beyond traditional donors and traditional hosting countries. The so-called missing middle should bridge existing gaps and become proactive agents of change. Steps should be taken to build a coherent and cohesive humanitarian ecosystem with strong synergies at the global, regional and national levels.

87. The President of the Philippines had expressed support for international action on behalf of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, including migrants and refugees, and the Philippine Development Plan provided for the upgrading of relevant policies and programmes. His Government had ratified the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 2022, promulgated the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act and implemented the Complimentary Pathways Programme for Rohingyas.

88. UNHCR must be given clear instructions and operational guidelines on how to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into its work. Developing countries should receive support for action to address climate displacement, in line with the Paris Agreement. It was also important to prevent the global food crisis and rising inflation from undermining the delivery of humanitarian services and rendering displaced persons more vulnerable. UNHCR must be provided with the resources and political support that it required to fulfil its mandate and to respond with agility and efficiency to humanitarian crises throughout the world.

89. **Mr. Fiqi Ahmed** (Somalia) said that his Government was grateful to UNHCR and the international community for their support for the action of the Federal Government of

Somalia aimed at providing protection and assistance for all afflicted and displaced persons, including returnees.

90. During the past few months, Somalia had experienced the worst drought in four decades. The global increase in food prices had brought the country to the brink of famine and more than 1 million people had been displaced. The Federal Government was taking vigorous action to address the emergency and the Prime Minister had announced the reactivation of the Somali Disaster Management Agency in August 2022.

91. Somalia hosted more than 3.1 million persons of concern to UNHCR. They included approximately 2,967,000 internally displaced persons, almost 136,000 returnees, and 33,670 refugees and asylum-seekers. In addition, almost 650,000 Somali refugees in the region were seeking to return home.

92. Somalia was a signatory to the 2017 Nairobi Declaration and on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and the Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia and cooperated with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in creating a favourable and sustainable environment for the return of refugees. A bill on refugees and a bill on internally displaced persons were pending adoption and the Federal Government was determined to enact them by 31 December 2022. The Federal Government also supported the implementation of the National Policy on Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, the Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Refugee-Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, and the National Eviction Guidelines.

93. The National Durable Solutions Strategy, which had been launched in March 2021, was fully aligned with the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees and incorporated all the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum. In particular, the Strategy was designed to facilitate returnees' reintegration process. The Federal Government appealed to the international community to support its efforts to bring peace and stability to Somalia.

94. **Mr. Mitarachi** (Greece) said that his Government had provided almost 1,000 humanitarian visas to female dignitaries and their families from Afghanistan in 2021 and had welcomed 75,000 people from Ukraine during 2022.

95. People should be provided with opportunities to lead a better life, but the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was incapable of resolving all global injustices. Smugglers earned a fortune in transferring migrants to countries that were signatories to the Convention, placing them at extreme risk, especially at sea. It was essential to preserve the integrity of the asylum system. Shelter should be provided to persons entitled to international protection in a coordinated manner, as the European Union had done in the case of Ukraine, but many asylum-seekers did not arrive directly from countries at risk. Smuggling networks determined who should be admitted to Europe, thereby creating asylum backlogs and lack of reception capacity in many countries, and adversely affecting public opinion on migration.

96. It was therefore important to establish legal procedures, to use screening mechanisms prior to migrants' arrival in Europe, and to introduce a mandatory relocation mechanism for all States members of the European Union so that first reception countries were not subjected to uneven and unfair pressure. As Greece was committed to protecting its border in line with international law, especially in cases of migrant smuggling for financial gain, it was essential to implement the 2016 Joint Statement following the High-level Political Dialogue between the European Union and Turkey. Greece welcomed action by UNCHR to prevent unlawful departures and to combat smuggling networks.

97. During the past eight years, Greece had welcomed over 1 million refugees, and it anticipated 35,000 applications for asylum in 2022. The country's asylum reception facilities had been greatly improved. They currently hosted 18,000 asylum-seekers and were fully compliant with European Union standards. The asylum backlog had been reduced from 200,000 to 30,000 applications. Priority was given to the protection of unaccompanied minors and successful action had been taken on relocations in cooperation with the country's European Union partners. All recognized refugees were offered full access to health care, education and employment. As migration constituted a key challenge during the current turbulent times, it was necessary to devise efficient collective management systems, to share best practices and to create protection spaces.

98. **Ms. Sendeza** (Malawi) said that the Government of Malawi had maintained its open borders policy and continued to host refugees and asylum-seekers despite the fact that the current caseload was more than 56,000 and the existing facilities were designed for the protection of just 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. The challenges were exacerbated by the limited resources available to enhance the existing capacity. All persons who arrived on the borders seeking international protection were registered, and the authorities had called for a verification exercise to ascertain which persons were genuinely in need of protection. Those who did not fall into that category would be transferred to the appropriate entities for processing and assistance.

99. Natural phenomena such as cyclones Ana and Gombe had undermined food security and some partners had unfortunately withdrawn their support. The Government of Malawi had appealed to different stakeholders and partners to provide the resources required for the management and support of refugees and asylum-seekers. It also invited UNHCR and all donor agencies to support the country's refugee and asylum-seeker management and operations as speedily as possible. The involvement of various stakeholders would also help to create strong synergies in assisting displaced persons.

100. The Malawian food distribution agency had targeted the administration of food assistance with a view to devising a plan for the provision of food supplies to persons of concern. However, the dissatisfaction of the beneficiaries of assistance with the unduly rapid administrative changes was putting pressure on the Government.

101. As effective solutions required universal cooperation and support, the Government of Malawi called on all Member States to encourage resettlement and voluntary repatriation as durable solutions. The Government fostered an environment that encouraged the voluntary return of asylum-seekers and refugees to countries where the circumstances had greatly improved and promoted their reintegration into society.

102. The results of a study conducted by Malawi on statelessness and risks of statelessness would be disseminated later in the month and would be shared with UNHCR. Steps were currently being taken to review the Refugee Act in order to ensure that it addressed emerging issues and alleviated the challenges faced by the Government in its management of refugees. The humanitarian operations by UNHCR in Malawi were greatly appreciated and the Government remained committed to promoting the best interests of refugees together with UNHCR and other partners.

103. **Mr. Motsoaledi** (South Africa) said that the South African Government appreciated the support provided by UNHCR for efforts to eradicate the backlog of asylum appeals. Joint training courses had been conducted with the Judicial Institute for Africa and enhanced training had been provided for new members of the Refugee Appeals Authority of South Africa. His Government was a major contributor and remained committed to extending its financial support for UNHCR operations.

104. South Africa had received over 20,000 requests for asylum since May 2022 and over 5,000 had already been adjudicated at first instance. Furthermore, over 89,000 requests for extension of asylum and refugee permits had been processed online and remained valid.

105. The majority of refugees were hosted by low- and middle-income countries, in which local communities often experienced high levels of poverty and economic vulnerability. Such circumstances, including in South Africa, led to economic competition between host and refugee countries and increased social tensions. While the hosting of refugees was an international obligation, it presented major challenges that needed to be discussed, such as deliberate and unnecessary causes of migration that placed a burden on host countries in terms of public resources and that created the potential for civil conflict. There was an urgent need to alleviate the burden on refugee hosting countries, especially developing countries, by implementing sustainable solutions based on the Global Compact on Refugees, such as action to address the root causes of forced displacement, and intensification of resettlement and voluntary returns.

106. Recalling the outcomes of the Global Compact on Refugees and the inaugural Global Refugee Forum on more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing among States, South Africa called on UNHCR and the international community to provide more support to host

countries. Several African countries hosted up to 65 per cent of the world's persons of concern and 16 countries in southern Africa hosted nearly 9.7 million persons of concern, including more than 1 million asylum-seekers and refugees. South Africa urged UNHCR to maximize its mandate to provide refugees with international protection, especially in the occupied territories of the Western Sahara and Palestine.

107. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the ratification by the Philippines of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. He had taken note of its strong appeal to “missing middle” countries to become proactive agents of change.

108. He fully agreed with the statement by Greece on preservation of the integrity of the asylum system, the need for better migration management and the importance of relocation in Europe. The European Union asylum model clearly required adjustment, especially in the light of the increase in human trafficking. UNHCR would consult States in Europe and elsewhere on procedures for implementing the solid principles enshrined in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It was the duty of all Governments to guarantee border security on behalf of their citizens, without prejudice to the protection of persons in need. They should not, for instance, resort to drastic measures such as border walls and pushbacks.

109. Somalia was facing major challenges such as drought, the legacy of past conflicts and a large number of internally displaced persons. UNHCR had stepped up its response to the situation, especially in the context of the IGAD, and it was greatly encouraged to hear of the country's commitments, particularly the National Durable Solutions Strategy.

110. He was pleased to hear that Malawi would continue to keep its borders open to persons in need, in line with the African spirit of generosity and solidarity. Although the challenges from climate-related phenomena and mixed flows were quite complicated, UNHCR would continue to assist Malawi in improving the management of the flows and in searching for solutions.

111. UNHCR attached great importance to its partnership with South Africa and would continue to honour all its commitments, especially on the backlog of asylum appeals and the complicated population flows. With regard to the appeal for greater burden sharing and an increase in support for host countries, the Global Refugee Forum scheduled for 2023 would provide an excellent opportunity to discuss the matter, and the opinion of South Africa would be greatly appreciated.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.