

**Executive Committee of the
High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Eighty-sixth meeting
7-9 March 2023**

Held at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), Geneva

Summary record,* Tuesday, 7 March 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Katharina Stasch..... (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Regional activities and global programmes (*continued*)

a. Regional updates (*continued*)

ii. Europe (*continued*)

1. The representative of **Poland** said that it was exactly one year since the Committee had met to discuss how to respond, given that thousands of innocent civilians – mostly children, women and girls, older people and persons with disabilities – were fleeing their country due to the unprovoked military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in what remained a clear and fully conscious violation of international law. The thousands of Ukrainian refugees had soon become millions, and the first month of their dramatic escape from war had turned into more than a year of forced exile. The Polish Government, condemning the brutal invasion in the strongest possible terms, had shown its commitment to European solidarity from the very outbreak of the war. Nearly 10 million people had crossed the Ukrainian–Polish border. At present, Poland was home to around 3.5 million Ukrainians, including over 1.5 million refugees registered for temporary protection. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2022 his Government had spent an estimated 8.36 billion euros – around 1.5 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) – on humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees, becoming one of the major donors to Ukraine in that sphere.

2. Polish support to Ukraine took the form of hosting and helping a large community of Ukrainian refugees; delivering Polish humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons in Ukraine; and serving as a gateway for transferring international humanitarian aid across the Polish border to Ukraine. In hosting refugees, his Government's main goal was to ensure the greatest, most rapid and thorough inclusion of Ukrainians in Polish society; it had also achieved its overarching aim not to establish any refugee camps in Poland. Thanks to the swift adoption of certain legal solutions, 1.5 million Ukrainians had already been granted a Polish Personal Identity Number and accessed the same public services as Polish nationals, including health care and social benefits. His Government provided open access to the labour market, with around 900,000 refugees having taken up employment by February 2023. Over 190,000 Ukrainian children and 400 Ukrainian teachers were already part of the Polish education system. The Polish Government facilitated online education, and scholarships for Ukrainian students and academics remained key to support for refugees present in Poland. Apart from hosting refugees, his Government also delivered humanitarian assistance directly in Ukraine, including to the health sector, and was constructing temporary modular towns for 20,000 internally displaced persons at an estimated cost of over 75 million euros. With regard to the localization of aid, in 2022 his Government had financed non-governmental organization (NGO) humanitarian projects with 2.5 million euros in food, health, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and logistics. Additionally, his Government was the largest single payer for Starlink terminals enabling Internet use in Ukraine.

3. He expressed solidarity with and appreciation for other countries hosting refugees in Europe and other parts of the world, including the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine had had dramatic consequences for the humanitarian situation worldwide. In that context, he supported the Grain from Ukraine initiative for establishing a framework to deliver Ukrainian food aid to the countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia which were most affected by hunger. At the launch of the programme, his Government had pledged to finance shipments of grain to Africa worth 20 million euros, standing united in assisting the populations of those countries. The Polish Government would continue its arduous efforts in supporting Ukraine by providing access to protection, rights and solutions, and was open to exchanging its valuable experience in those areas with hosting States from other regions, as well as to working constructively with international organizations, in particular UNHCR. Together, the international community was stronger in its response.

4. The representative of **Bulgaria** said that more than one year since the Russian Federation had launched its unprovoked and unjustified military invasion of Ukraine, nearly a third of Ukraine's population remained displaced. Almost 8 million people had fled across international borders in search of safety and protection. He reiterated the Bulgarian Government's condemnation of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine in the strongest possible terms, deploring the casualties, massive displacement of civilians, catastrophic destruction of vital civilian infrastructure and continued worsening of the overall humanitarian situation entailed by that aggression, and expressing full solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

5. He welcomed the Office's tireless efforts to help Ukrainian refugees and the courage of its staff to stay and deliver in the field. His Government continued to stand in solidarity with Ukraine's neighbouring countries, joining the commendation of the Moldovan Government for its remarkable hospitality since the beginning of the Russian Federation's aggression, in particular its recent decision to activate temporary

protection for Ukrainian refugees. He reaffirmed his Government's international humanitarian commitments: its borders would remain open to everyone fleeing the war in Ukraine without discrimination. From the beginning of the war of aggression, more than 1,056,000 Ukrainians had entered Bulgaria. As of 27 February 2023, more than 150,000 had applied for temporary protection, of which around 76,000 were women and 52,000 children. At present, more than 52,000 remained on Bulgarian territory. Fully understanding refugees' need for continued support and solidarity until they could return to their homes in safety and dignity, the Bulgarian Government had become one of the first in the European Union to grant temporary protection through measures including legislative amendments. Ukrainian citizens with temporary protection had access to the labour market and enjoyed guaranteed access to the same medical care as Bulgarian citizens, as well as accommodation, social welfare assistance and education. He welcomed the excellent bilateral cooperation with UNHCR in that regard, the "blue dots" initiative implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the cash for protection programme carried out together with the Bulgarian Red Cross.

6. The war had had a devastating impact on Ukrainian children, who continued to deal with fear, anxiety, separation from their families, displacement from their birthplaces, isolation and the complete upheaval of their childhood. To protect an entire generation scarred by a brutal war, the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into national education systems was of great importance, along with mental health support and access to all basic services. His Government would continue working with UNHCR, UNICEF and Bulgarian civil society organizations in that direction. He hoped that UNHCR and other competent international bodies would be able to duly address the deeply troubling reports of Ukrainian children being forcibly transferred to the Russian Federation's territory.

7. The representative of **Luxembourg** said that his Government supported the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and expressed its unfailing solidarity with the Ukrainian people. One year after the invasion by the Russian Federation, not a day passed without its forces attacking Ukrainian water, electricity and gas supplies, as well as civil infrastructure such as houses, hospitals and schools. The Russian Federation must immediately cease the horrific war and withdraw its armed forces from Ukrainian territory to within its internationally recognized boundaries. He stressed the necessity of unimpeded humanitarian access to meet the Ukrainian people's humanitarian needs; a coordinated, collective response to the developing humanitarian crisis was of the greatest importance.

8. Despite the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the Government of Luxembourg remained determined to allocate 1 per cent of its GDP to official development assistance. His Government had stood with the Ukrainian Government from the start and had so far provided more than 8 million euros of humanitarian aid via several United Nations agencies, NGOs and the Red Crescent Movement, as well as 4 million euros in kind such as medical equipment, medicines and connectivity services. More than 5,000 Ukrainians, most of them women and children, had been welcomed into his country following their request for temporary protection. The Government of Luxembourg, together with its European partners, would continue to support Ukraine based on shared respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. He praised the Office's tireless work in strengthening its efforts to protect, assist and meet the ever-growing needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced and stateless persons throughout the world. As mental health and psychosocial support were essential to health and well-being, he congratulated UNHCR on its increased attention to that area. UNHCR could rely on his Government's continued political and financial support.

9. The representative of **Romania** condemned in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's military aggression against Ukraine and deplored the human suffering caused. The Romanian Government firmly condemned the indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and infrastructure, a grave violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Forced deportation and forcible transfer to the Russian Federation of Ukrainians, including children, was a further grave violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and UNHCR should consider preparing a report on the matter. He thanked UNHCR for its continuous engagement that had saved thousands of lives and helped protect thousands more. His Government had contributed to the Office's work in Ukraine by allocating 300 million euros for winterization purposes at the end of 2022.

10. Over 3.5 million Ukrainians had entered Romania so far and over 130,000 now remained. They had been welcomed and provided with a comprehensive array of support services equivalent to those of any Romanian citizen. The Romanian Government had established a clear decision-making and coordination structure to enable agencies to effectively respond to the humanitarian crisis at the policy level and on the ground, acknowledging that protection was the cornerstone of an effective humanitarian response. In a large collaborative effort between public entities, international organizations, United Nations agencies and civil society, his Government had designed and adopted a national plan of measures for the protection and

inclusion of Ukrainian refugees – one of the first in Europe – and allocated 200 million euros from the State budget for its annual implementation. Before the Black Sea grain deal had started, over 30 million tonnes of grain had passed through Romanian ports.

11. The Romanian Government was concerned about the exposure of children to war atrocities, leading to trauma for years to come. Since 24 February 2022, the Government had tailored its humanitarian response to Ukrainian children's needs, ensuring first of all the provision of education and psychosocial support, in total agreement with the approach outlined by the Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe regarding protection of children. The Government, local authorities, the private sector, civil society and international organizations and institutions had all worked together in solidarity with the Ukrainian people, reflecting the essence and strength of the free world: to stand united in core values.

12. The representative of **Hungary** said that her Government was extremely concerned about the war in Ukraine and condemned the Russian Federation's unprovoked aggression. The Hungarian Government supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and expressed full solidarity with its neighbour. The burden of the humanitarian crisis and the economic consequences of the war and sanctions affected everyone, but nearby countries such as her own also faced enormous security risks. It was of the utmost importance for her Government to guarantee the protection of Hungarian citizens by providing safety for the millions of people from Ukraine forced to leave their homes.

13. To date, 2.1 million people had arrived in Hungary from Ukraine. Those who stayed were provided with jobs, equal access to education and health care and the right to work from the moment of submitting the request for recognition or temporary protection. Hungary's borders were kept open, and by 5 February 2023, out of the more than 34,000 people who had applied for temporary protection, more than 30,600 had received it. Her Government had carried out the largest humanitarian operation in her country's history, providing Ukraine with medical supplies, food, water, hygiene products, childcare products, fuel and other essential goods amounting to more than 34 million euros. It was ready to continue that operation for as long as needed. It also supported local authorities and governmental service providers in Ukraine with financial and technical assistance to keep critical infrastructure operational. Strongly advocating for a peaceful solution to the brutal war, which must end as soon as possible, she reiterated the importance of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The international community should support every initiative aiming at an immediate ceasefire and meaningful peace negotiations.

14. The representative of the **United States of America**, expressing condolences for earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic and the loss of UNHCR staff, said that her Government was expediting those in its resettlement queue impacted by the earthquake, where possible, and had announced an additional \$100 million of humanitarian assistance in response to the earthquakes. She commended Türkiye for hosting over 4 million refugees – more than any other country – while encouraging close cooperation between Türkiye and UNHCR to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees, including non-Syrians, were registered, referred to appropriate services and integrated into national systems. Reports of pushbacks at Türkiye's border with the Islamic Republic of Iran and of increased calls for refugee returns to the Syrian Arab Republic were of concern, since UNHCR had clearly stated that the country was not safe for large-scale returns. UNHCR should continue to engage with the Government of Türkiye on upholding Turkish migration law, finding durable solutions with respect for the principle of non-refoulement and maintaining protections for refugees in Türkiye.

15. On the grim milestone of one year since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, she deplored the catastrophic impact of the war on so many, both within and outside Ukraine. Russia should immediately cease its unlawful use of force against Ukraine, withdraw its troops from Ukraine's territory and bring an end to its war. It must abide by its obligations under the Geneva Conventions by allowing access to prisoners of war and civilians held by Russian forces. It must allow immediate access to children and others taken to Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine and to the Russian Federation itself. It should abide by its international obligations to respect and protect civilians, including aid workers, and allow all civilians unhindered access to assistance and protection.

16. The Government of the United States was grateful to UNHCR for its critical efforts in Ukraine and throughout Europe to protect the vulnerable, provide life-saving assistance and strengthen the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. Since 24 February 2022, her Government had provided more than \$1.9 billion in humanitarian assistance to support vulnerable populations and communities inside Ukraine and in the region. It was continuing to work with its European partners at the forefront of the response who had opened their borders and communities to those fleeing the Russian aggression; she applauded their generosity, compassion and fortitude. As with any refugee situation, her Government called on the international community to respond to the needs of those seeking protection, regardless of race, ethnicity,

national origin, sexual orientation or gender identity, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement and States' obligations under international law.

17. The representative of **Germany** expressed condolences to the people of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic for the devastating earthquakes, along with sincere appreciation to all humanitarian workers who continued to provide life-saving assistance and support to those in need.

18. One year after the Russian Federation had launched its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the war continued to devastate the country, forcing more than 13 million Ukrainians to flee. That unacceptable violation of the Charter of the United Nations could not be ignored; she stressed that it was Russia's responsibility to stop its illegal war of aggression. The international community's collective response to the suffering of millions of Ukrainians must centre on the protection of civilians, especially people in vulnerable situations. Child protection was particularly vital in armed conflict, and the German Government therefore was highly concerned by reports of abductions and forced involuntary naturalizations or adoptions. All forcibly transferred children must be reunited with their families, and all measures involving the involuntary alteration of citizenship must cease. The Russian Federation must facilitate immediate and unimpeded access for UNHCR to all Ukrainian refugees, in particular children.

19. Her Government had contributed more than 468 million euros in humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians and host communities – 78 million in 2022 for UNHCR alone – and remained determined to continue its support. It was hosting more than 1 million Ukrainians who had fled the Russian Federation's war, alongside Ukraine's neighbours that were generously hosting Ukrainian refugees, such as Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania.

20. The war had not only brought immense suffering upon the people of Ukraine, but continued to exacerbate existing fragilities in the global economy, endangering vulnerable populations worldwide and diminishing the international community's capacity and resources to protect those in need. Her Government would continue to support vulnerable populations and their host States worldwide. It remained concerned by the violence and tensions in the greater Nagorno-Karabakh region and called on all parties to provide unhindered access to humanitarian organizations.

21. Germany was also concerned about the increasing number of people undertaking dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean and profoundly regretted the tragic loss of life at sea. Her Government reiterated its full commitment to international law, international protection and the principle of non-refoulement. It shared the concerns of UNHCR about the externalization of asylum procedures and continued to support unhindered access to asylum systems. In view of the clear need for adequate global burden- and responsibility-sharing, the German Government was considering ways to further develop its asylum and migration systems, including through complementary pathways.

22. The representative of the **Republic of Moldova** said the ever-increasing challenges and needs for UNHCR intervention were a source of inescapable concern. Conflict and persecution continued to leave a devastating impact on the most vulnerable, including refugees, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and returnees. The ongoing effects of COVID-19 and the many natural disasters, as had recently been seen in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, were having devastating consequences for millions of people. Yet UNHCR had commendably succeeded, through its global programmes, in responding to those challenges.

23. The Moldovan Government could confirm, based on its unfortunate experience on the ground, that UNHCR was able to respond to the unknown. The support provided in tackling the terrible humanitarian crisis unfolding for over a year in and around Ukraine following the unlawful war of aggression started by the Russian Federation was a vivid example. Many of the key principles identified in the work of UNHCR – such as matching operational challenges with activities, complementarity, increased and more effective communication and involvement with local communities and authorities – had been effectively put in place in the Republic of Moldova, where almost 1 million people had crossed the border seeking refuge from the war and around 80,000 people had stayed. UNHCR had assisted the Moldovan Government in its coordinated actions to manage both transit and refugee flows from Ukraine.

24. In line with Moldova's international commitments, all refugees received the necessary support, including in such areas as protection, accommodation, transportation, education, health and livelihood support. In March 2023, a mechanism for granting temporary protection to Ukrainians refugees had entered into force in Moldova for one year. Since the last meeting of the Standing Committee, the challenges had shifted from managing large flows and accommodating refugees in specialized centres to policy actions aimed to ensure their integration into society by providing access to the labour market, social protection, care and schooling. The Moldovan Government sought to implement human rights-based, gender- and age-responsive policies in order to uphold the fundamental rights of refugees based on equity, equality and

inclusion. Long-term and sustainable solutions must be ensured for everyone: cooperation between UNHCR and United Nations or European-led initiatives was therefore a priority for the forthcoming period.

25. The representative of **Greece** said that a year had passed since the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, resulting in an abominable loss of lives, an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in that country and massive forced displacement to other European countries. He reiterated his Government's commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. Those universal principles should be upheld by all. UNHCR, along with all other humanitarian partners in the field, operated and delivered notwithstanding extremely perilous conditions. The Greek Government was deeply grateful for its endurance and dedication, and commended Ukraine's neighbouring countries for their generous assistance and support to refugees. His Government had also tangibly demonstrated its solidarity and support towards Ukraine since the very beginning, providing humanitarian assistance including medical supplies, both inside Ukraine as well as to Ukrainian refugees in neighbouring countries; sending its foreign minister to accompany the first batch of humanitarian aid that arrived in Odessa on 3 April 2022; and transporting 400 tonnes of humanitarian assistance so far. Acknowledging the extremely dire humanitarian situation, his Government would continue to provide shelter equipment, core relief items, medical aid and food supplies. It had so far welcomed thousands of Ukrainian refugees, granting temporary protection status as provided for in European Union legislation to approximately 22,000 of them. In cases of unaccompanied minors, the Greek national mechanism for detection and protection of unaccompanied minors was activated to ensure the transfer of children to special emergency accommodation structures.

26. The Greek Government, shocked by the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic on 6 February 2023, had been among the first to offer support to Türkiye by dispatching two search and rescue teams. So far, via the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism, it had provided 80 tonnes of humanitarian assistance, including shelter equipment and medical supplies. His Government had also dispatched humanitarian aid to the Syrian Arab Republic, including shelter equipment and medicines, through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) warehouse in Gaziantep.

27. Within the framework of its voluntary relocation programme, more than 5,000 beneficiaries of international protection, among them more than 1,300 unaccompanied minors, had so far been transferred to 16 European Union member States and Schengen countries. The Greek Government expressed its appreciation in that connection for all the support, advice and expertise given by UNHCR over the years.

28. The representative of **Japan** said that the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation was an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo by force. It was an outrage constituting a blatant violation of international law and international humanitarian law and undermining the very foundation of the international order. As such, it was unacceptable, and the Japanese Government condemned it in the strongest terms, standing with the citizens of Ukraine who were doing their utmost to take actions to defend their sovereignty, territory, homeland and families. His Government had so far provided assistance to Ukraine and neighbouring countries through humanitarian support, food, financing, recovery and reconstruction through UNHCR and other international organizations, including recently announced additional financial assistance of \$5.5 billion to Ukraine. In total, approximately \$7.1 billion in assistance had been announced and steadily rolled out. At that crucial juncture for the international community, and in the spirit of solidarity, the Government of Japan was also providing temporary protection to over 2,000 people fleeing from Ukraine to third countries.

29. He expressed his Government's deepest condolences to those who had lost their loved ones in the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, including UNHCR staff. Türkiye was the world's largest refugee-hosting country, and his Government wished to provide it with as much support as possible. In addition to dispatching rescue teams and providing emergency relief supplies, the Japanese Government had given financial support to international organizations, including UNHCR, and to Japanese NGOs to implement humanitarian assistance in Türkiye.

30. The representative of **Austria** said that Ukrainians had experienced unspeakable suffering, massive displacement and enormous destruction since the start of the Russian invasion. However, the consequences of the war, including food insecurity and scarce energy resources, went beyond Ukraine, impacting countries all over the world. She strongly condemned the unprovoked and unjustified war. The targeted attacks on civilian populations and infrastructure by the Russian Federation amounted to massive breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law. The fake referenda and illegal attempts to annex the Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions were null and void, as was any forcible conferral of Russian citizenship on Ukrainian nationals. She called on the Russian Federation to stop the bloodshed, withdraw its troops and respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

31. Her Government was appalled by reports that Ukrainian children were being abducted, forcibly put up for adoption and naturalized by the Russian Federation. The Russian Government must immediately

stop those practices, return abducted children to Ukraine and reunite them with their families. It was vital to fully respect and protect the rights of the child. UNHCR must be granted immediate and unimpeded access to all Ukrainian refugees on Russian territory, particularly children. Austria welcomed the fact that UNHCR had scaled up its operations in Ukraine, as well as in neighbouring countries hosting displaced Ukrainians, notwithstanding the difficult and unpredictable security situation. It likewise welcomed the focus placed on gender mainstreaming, including the mitigation of sexual and gender-based violence, health, education and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

32. The Government of Austria stood by Ukraine in undivided and unbreakable solidarity. More than 92,000 displaced Ukrainians, mostly women and children, had been registered in Austria under the Temporary Protection Directive of the European Union, with the temporary right to stay until March 2024. They had full access to housing, health care, work, education and basic assistance. Furthermore, the Government had donated over 129 million euros in bilateral humanitarian assistance in support of Ukrainians, including over 70 million euros to international humanitarian and civil society organizations. A total of 43 ambulance vehicles and fire trucks had been delivered, in addition to 1,165 tonnes of in-kind donations such as food and hospital beds. The Governments of Austria and Ukraine had signed a framework agreement on the construction of three hospital buildings worth 600 million euros. In 2022, Austria had processed the second highest number of asylum applications in the European Union and accepted the second highest number of refugees per capita.

33. The representative of **Spain** said that the war in Ukraine was a flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the international rules-based order. It was important to remember that the millions of people killed or displaced, mostly women and children, were real people and not just numbers. He strongly condemned the invasion and called on the Russian Federation to end the aggression and withdraw its troops.

34. His Government had taken a number of measures to support Ukraine and neighbouring countries with the help of partners such as UNHCR. It had contributed 40 million euros in aid and sent over equipment, including ambulances and electric generators. Going forward, it was important to help restore basic services in Ukraine while also addressing other humanitarian crises around the world. Spain was currently hosting 166,000 Ukrainian refugees, including 2,000 unaccompanied minors. It had also been the first country to implement the Temporary Protection Directive. UNHCR should focus its efforts on protecting women and combatting human trafficking. In addition, the illegal deportation of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation could not be tolerated.

35. The Government of Spain had contributed 1.5 million euros in support of victims of the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic. It was also providing other types of assistance, such as field hospitals. Spain was a frontline country, experiencing a large influx of refugees and migrants, largely because of trafficking. The number of applications for refugee status had gone up by 45 per cent in the past 10 years, thus forcing the Government to adapt its refugee and asylum services by strengthening technological capacities and human resources. In 2022, refugee status had been granted to more than 14,000 people, most of whom had come from Mali, Syria, Afghanistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Colombia. Clearly, therefore, Spain was both a donor country and a host country complying with its responsibilities and showing global solidarity. Efforts were ongoing to strengthen legal migration channels, which could be done by signing circular migration agreements with partners and supporting countries of origin and transit. There was a particular need to combat trafficking networks which put many lives at risk. He called on the international community to commit to the principle of solidarity and shared responsibilities.

36. The representative of the **Netherlands** said that his Government was doing its best to prevent migrants from using high-risk routes and hold human traffickers accountable. It had formed partnerships with a number of countries to support them with asylum procedures, reception and return. The current access issues in Ukraine and the Russian Federation were matters of concern. All barriers preventing access to refugees and other displaced persons, especially children, must be removed as soon as possible. He was especially concerned about reports that Ukrainian children were being forcibly deported to the Russian Federation, adopted, naturalized and cut off from their families and culture. Those were gross violations of international law and must be stopped immediately. UNHCR must be granted access to all forcibly displaced Ukrainians, particularly children. He called on UNHCR to clarify its protection objectives in Ukraine, especially as it increased its focus on the frontline and on newly accessible areas.

37. The representative of **Finland** said that the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation was a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations which must be condemned in the strongest terms. The Russian Federation must immediately cease military action and withdraw its armed forces from Ukraine. He expressed appreciation to neighbouring countries hosting large

numbers of refugees, and to UNHCR and its staff for providing protection, shelter and assistance. He reiterated the importance of a protection-centred approach and the need to focus on the people most at risk, such as persons with disabilities. The situation of children, particularly of those forcibly transferred to the Russian Federation, was of deep concern and must be dealt with as a priority. The international community should be encouraged to collect information and facilitate the safe return of Ukrainian children.

38. The Government of Finland had provided 140 million euros in humanitarian aid and development cooperation assistance to Ukraine. While the focus remained on immediate needs, efforts would be made to support the long-term reconstruction of Ukraine, together with partners. There were also plans to provide additional support to refugees in Moldova. The support had been provided without reducing funding for other crises around the world. The utmost would be done to continue donations in 2023.

39. Since the beginning of the war, the Government of Finland had received approximately 50,200 applications for temporary protection from Ukrainians. It was ready to increase its capacity as needed through the establishment of new reception centres and the expansion of current ones. A temporary amendment to the Aliens Act would ensure that residence permits granted to Ukrainians were valid for as long as temporary protection was in effect in the European Union. People under temporary protection had access to work and integration services. Employment was being facilitated through information campaigns, language training and recruitment events, among other things. Lastly, his Government would do its best to enable and support the return of Ukrainians to their homeland, as soon as it became possible.

40. The representative of **Denmark** condemned in the strongest terms the unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which was a blatant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Russian missile strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure, indiscriminate killing of civilians and reports of sexual and gender-based violence were appalling. Her Government was particularly concerned about reports of Russian authorities forcibly and systematically deporting children from Ukraine. The Russian Federation must stop those practices and return all abducted children without delay. UNHCR must be granted immediate and unimpeded access to all Ukrainians, including forcibly deported children. She commended UNHCR for the massive scale-up of its operations in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

41. The Government of Denmark remained committed to mitigating the global impacts of the war in Ukraine, such as food and energy insecurity. It had recently presented a new support package of 33 million euros to food insecure countries struggling as a result of the war. Equally, her Government would continue to stand by Ukraine. So far, it had committed over \$65 million to meeting the immediate humanitarian needs in the country. There was, however, only one true solution to the crisis: the Russian Federation must stop its aggression.

42. The representative of the **Russian Federation** said that the humanitarian work conducted by UNHCR was relevant and efficient. UNHCR must continue acting in accordance with the principles of neutrality, independence, impartiality and humanity, in full compliance with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. His Government welcomed the readiness expressed by UNHCR to help implement paragraph 7 of the joint statement made by the leaders of the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and Armenia on 9 November 2020 regarding a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. He expressed concern regarding the complex migration situation in Europe, including instances of pushbacks. UNHCR must continue to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees and their reintegration back into their country. He drew attention to mass statelessness in many European countries and pointed out that the report did not fully reflect the problem. Reduction of statelessness, including in Europe, must remain a priority for UNHCR.

43. The Russian Federation had an integrated asylum system and was currently hosting more than 68,000 refugees. The number of stateless persons on Russian territory had been decreasing every year, with about 800,000 stateless persons having already been naturalized. His Government was pressing on with reforms of its legislation on migration in order to improve the protection and integration of asylum-seekers as well as to attain the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees. Similarly, large volumes of humanitarian assistance were being provided to countries of origin, both bilaterally and multilaterally. It was unfortunate that the voluntary contribution of the Russian Federation to the UNHCR budget for 2022 had not been accepted due to anti-Russian sanctions.

44. In 2022, the Russian Federation had seen a significant increase in arrivals from Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, as well as Ukraine. An awareness campaign had been conducted among those refugees about the opportunities available for them to settle their legal status. Efforts had also been made to streamline temporary asylum procedures, provide free food, accommodation and health care, guarantee the right to employment and offer social benefits to the vulnerable. Work was currently under way to issue

Russian passports to the citizens of the new regions of the Russian Federation, namely Kherson, Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia. Accordingly, the number of asylum-seekers was expected to fall.

45. The representative of **Sweden** said that the illegal and unprovoked aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine had resulted in a massive humanitarian crisis, including large-scale displacement and tremendous human suffering, with repercussions across the globe. Her Government strongly condemned the aggression, which showed an utter disregard for international humanitarian law. She commended the efforts made by UNHCR to rapidly scale up its operations over the past year and applauded its dangerous but life-saving work in Ukraine. A continued focus should be placed on reaching the most vulnerable people in hard-to-reach, frontline-facing areas so that precious humanitarian resources could be made available where the needs were most severe. The same approach should apply in the centres whose aim should be to offer shelter and protection to the most vulnerable. Strong coordination was needed with Ukrainian authorities and non-governmental organizations, including at the local level. The close cooperation between UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine was a good example of partnership with national institutions.

46. The Government of Sweden stood with Ukraine and would continue to do so for as long as was necessary. It had committed more than 150 million euros of humanitarian assistance in 2022 and would make continued assistance a key priority of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Her Government would continue working on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum during its presidency, while also addressing legal migration files and visa and return issues. It was important to make progress on the Pact as a whole in order to achieve a sustainable system, equipped to handle future challenges. Balancing solidarity and responsibility was key.

47. The representative of the **Holy See** expressed profound sorrow and great concern over the conflict in Ukraine. The toll of the dead and wounded, the number of refugees and displaced persons, the destruction and the economic and social damage showed, once again, the tragic absurdity of war. The Holy See was grateful to Ukraine's neighbouring countries, not only for respecting their international obligations but also for freely and generously welcoming over 8 million people in need of protection. He recognized the success of the Temporary Protection Directive in the context of Ukraine as well as the much-needed assistance that the European Union had provided to third country nationals stranded amidst the conflict. Such concerted action showed that solid responses were possible when humanitarian concerns prevailed over political impasses. It was vital to end the war in Ukraine and achieve true, lasting and just peace. He commended local-level responses, such as those by communities, civil society and the Catholic Church, which continued to provide assistance to displaced populations, including food, spiritual support and health care.

48. Although the war in Ukraine was a priority, it must not detract attention from the numerous other humanitarian crises requiring urgent assistance or from the protracted situations of displacement affecting several parts of the world, including Europe. In particular, he wished to highlight the plight of unaccompanied children on the move, especially those trying to reach a safe haven in Europe. Far too often, children were stranded in transit and exposed to the risks of human trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse. As such, the Holy See shared concerns over the increasing number of violent pushbacks at Europe's land and sea borders, in flagrant violation of the principle of non-refoulement. It was deplorable that lives continued to be lost at sea. Whether people had a legal right to international protection was irrelevant, as such tragedies were always a loss for humanity. Shifting responsibilities and blame games only resulted in more suffering and lives lost. The sacredness of life must be respected in all contexts and at all times.

49. The representative of **Portugal** said that her Government stood in solidarity with the people of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic following the recent earthquakes. It was ready to support relief efforts, including by speeding up the transfer of refugees who had already been accepted under the national resettlement programme. Europe was facing a major humanitarian crisis as a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine. One year on, 8,000 civilians had died, 8 million people had fled to neighbouring countries and 7.8 million children were being deprived of their childhood. The attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure continued to aggravate the humanitarian crisis. Portugal remained resolute in its support for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and would continue to provide assistance.

50. Her Government commended the solidarity and generosity of countries in the region and stood ready to share the refugee burden, having already granted temporary protection to more than 50,000 people of all nationalities fleeing the war in Ukraine. Close collaboration with municipalities and civil society organizations as well as with the Ukrainian community in Portugal was helping to provide displaced people with housing, jobs and education. Thousands of refugees had now enrolled in public school, higher education, vocational training and Portuguese language classes. A package of social benefits was available to those seeking protection. Lastly, through the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, the Government had provided Ukraine and Moldova with 1.8 million euros' worth of in-kind assistance,

including medicines, medical devices and personal protective equipment, and it was engaged in the reconstruction of schools, namely in the Zhytomyr region. She commended the efforts made by UNHCR and its partners to deliver humanitarian assistance in such difficult circumstances.

51. The representative of **France** said that the illegal war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine was a violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Massive violations of human rights had compounded the humanitarian needs of Ukrainians and caused unprecedented levels of displacement. He commended the Ukrainian people for their courage and applauded UNHCR and its partners for continuing to deliver assistance to populations in need. His Government wished to express its solidarity with Ukraine, committing itself to provide humanitarian support wherever necessary.

52. Since the start of the war, the Government of France had allocated 276 million euros in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and convened an international conference on solidarity with the Ukrainian people to raise further funds. Winter protections had been provided in addition to childcare and support for victims of sexual violence. His country was currently hosting 100,000 Ukrainian refugees. Among them were 20,000 children and 1,200 students who were enrolled in education. Additionally, his Government had taken steps to address the global consequences of the war. It was paying particular attention to the global food crisis, having launched a number of initiatives, such as the Food and Agriculture Resilience Mission (FARM) and Save the Crops. With regard to the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, which was deteriorating every day, he said the Government of France was taking action by doubling the assistance it provided to humanitarian organizations on the ground and supporting discussions between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

53. The representative of **Latvia** said that the scale of human suffering and destruction of civilian infrastructure continued to rise one year on since the start of the war in Ukraine. However, the effects of the war went beyond Ukraine and Europe. The intentional targeting of the Ukrainian agricultural sector, together with the disruption of supply chains, were negatively impacting global food security, particularly in low- and middle-income, food-importing countries, with the most vulnerable hit the hardest. She commended the coordinated efforts of humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, in Ukraine, neighbouring countries and across the globe in response to the food security crisis. The Government of Latvia had been providing all possible aid to Ukraine and its people, including displaced persons, and would continue to do so for as long as necessary.

54. The responsibility for the devastating and senseless war in Ukraine along with its global ramifications lay with the Russian Federation, as well as with Belarus for serving as a launch pad for Russian troops and missiles. The Belarussian authorities were also involved in the practice of luring third country nationals to their territory and forcing them to cross the border into the European Union illegally. Instrumentalization of migrants was completely unacceptable. UNHCR must call on Belarus to respect its international humanitarian and human rights obligations and cease the practice just mentioned. She called on the Russian Federation to immediately stop its use of force against Ukraine, withdraw its troops unconditionally and refrain from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any sovereign State.

55. The representative of **Croatia** said that as a country that had itself experienced the consequences of military aggression, Croatia understood the situation in Ukraine particularly well and would continue to provide its unwavering support to the people of Ukraine in the face of the Russian Federation's war of aggression. Support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity stemmed from a firm belief in the rules-based international order and multilateral cooperation. The humanitarian community must continue to address the serious challenges facing Ukraine, notably by providing winterized shelters and ensuring humanitarian access to the whole country. News that Ukrainian children were being forcibly taken into Russian territory was also of very great concern.

56. Close cooperation with local actors and flexible and sustained funding remained vital. Croatia had provided more than 13.3 million euros in emergency and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and had taken in almost 23,000 Ukrainian citizens. Most of them had been registered for temporary protection status, giving them access to health care, social services, education and employment. A bilingual website and application process, including Ukrainian language interpreters, had been set up to provide all the necessary information for displaced people. Croatia was also procuring up to 50 generators for schools and hospitals in Ukraine, in coordination with UNICEF.

57. Croatia stood ready to assist with Ukraine's post-war recovery and reconstruction, and in that regard welcomed the establishment of a multi-agency donor coordination platform for Ukraine. Demining was a fundamental prerequisite for the safe return of people, the delivery of humanitarian aid and sustainable recovery and reconstruction; Croatia had therefore invested more than 4 million euros in demining efforts and would continue to share its experience and assistance in that regard, as well as in the field of war-

related psychosocial rehabilitation programmes. In response to the negative impact of the war on global food security, Croatia had also offered the use of its ports for exporting Ukrainian grain through the European Union's "Solidarity Lanes" initiative.

58. The representative of the **Philippines** expressed concern at the scale of forced displacement in Ukraine and the humanitarian cost of the current crisis, which required massive assistance. There needed to be respect for humanitarian principles in responding to the needs of displaced people, and safe access for aid workers should be assured. It was the duty of all nations to ensure respect for the principle of sovereignty and the sovereign equality of States. The Philippines would support UNHCR and other United Nations agencies in addressing the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, including through financial contributions.

59. The increase in arrivals of asylum-seekers and migrants via the Mediterranean sea and north-west African maritime routes pointed to a pressing need for all stakeholders to promote safe and legal pathways for people on the move. It was a humanitarian obligation to refrain from acts of expulsion and violent pushbacks, which were happening at all major routes into Europe. The trend for legalization of such practices was alarming, as they exacerbated the vulnerability of people on the move and contravened the letter and the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention.

60. The representative of **Canada** expressed deep concern for the unprecedented level of humanitarian need in Europe, driven primarily by Russia's illegal and unjustifiable aggression against Ukraine, and more recently by the tragic consequences of the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic. He commended the efforts of UNHCR staff and partners who had stayed and delivered in Ukraine and were responding to the needs of the many forcibly displaced people in the region. He also recognized the extraordinary efforts of those providing emergency relief for earthquake survivors and offered his condolences for the loss of UNHCR personnel.

61. Referring to the lack of access to the most vulnerable populations in Ukraine, he said that Canada applauded the inter-agency humanitarian convoys providing assistance to frontline areas. He requested an update on the provision of humanitarian assistance in areas under temporary Russian military control in eastern and southern Ukraine, as well as on the exceptionally high proportion of women and children at risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse in Ukraine. An update would also be appreciated on the Office's child protection efforts, including for Ukrainian children and unaccompanied minors in Russia. Canada would continue to support the humanitarian response in Ukraine and the region. It was helping Ukrainian families find a safe, temporary home in Canada, with access to support services. To date, 560,000 authorizations for emergency travel had been approved, and more than 170,000 Ukrainians had arrived in Canada since the start of 2022.

62. Canada had also supported a rapid scaling-up of humanitarian assistance in response to the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, having pledged \$50 million to the effort. He commended leadership role of UNHCR in the design and delivery of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), including its critical role in providing assistance to refugee communities in Türkiye. Recognizing the critical role of local actors – particularly women-led and women's rights organizations – to the humanitarian response in both crises, he requested an update on how UNHCR was downstream funding to local organizations. Canada would continue to monitor developments in the region and stood ready to provide additional support, as needed.

63. The representative of **Norway** strongly condemned Russia's ongoing attacks on Ukraine. The war had had dramatic consequences, first and foremost for the people of Ukraine, 15 million of whom had been forced to flee their homes. UNHCR and its local partners were to be commended for their work. The protection and well-being of children must remain at the heart of the international response; Norway was concerned by reports of children from Ukraine being forcibly taken to the Russian Federation, and called for such abductions to cease and the children returned without delay. In June 2023, a conference would be held in Oslo on the protection of children in armed conflict and would include a session on displaced children. The objective of the conference was to have pledges for action to enhance the protection of children in armed conflict, an issue in which UNHCR had an important role. Norway was committed to meeting the immediate needs of Ukraine and to long-term reconstruction; it would be providing 75 billion Norwegian krone in support over the next five years, in addition to its responses to other humanitarian crises.

64. The war had also had far-reaching consequences across the globe, with vulnerable populations hit by higher prices for food, fertilizer and energy. To help offset those effects, Norway had made an additional allocation in 2023 for severely affected countries. Norway commended all countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, the majority having sought safety in neighbouring countries. It continued to grant temporary

protection to those arriving from Ukraine and would be automatically extending the residence permits that had already been issued for another year.

65. The representative of **Belgium** said that solidarity with the Ukrainian people remained important: the invasion had led to indiscriminate violence against civilians, both during active fighting and in Russian-occupied areas. The Office's leadership position was key to meeting priority needs. Belgium was particularly concerned about gender-based violence, as it was difficult to discern real progress on the ground. It was important to support local humanitarian actors, since their familiarity with the situation and with vulnerable populations ensured that aid could be delivered most successfully. That also gave local communities and internally displaced people a degree of ownership of the response, promoting resilience in the face of the frequent Russian attacks. Humanitarian access to all regions, including those controlled by Russian and separatist forces, was primordial to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable. In 2022, Belgium had provided support for the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, in addition to its usual humanitarian budget.

66. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** commended the work of UNHCR and its partners over the past year in responding to the needs of refugees fleeing the Russian Federation's unprovoked and premeditated invasion of Ukraine. He expressed deep gratitude to countries hosting Ukrainian refugees and welcomed the Office's plan to continue supporting host country governments with regard to refugee inclusion in 2023. The United Kingdom had worked to ensure that those fleeing the war could find safety in the United Kingdom, issuing 220,300 visas to date.

67. Since 24 February 2022, the United Kingdom had provided over 220 million pounds sterling (£) in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and the region, as well as over £1.25 billion in guarantees for multilateral development bank lending to Ukraine. The right conditions for return depended on a just and lasting peace, and therefore the United Kingdom stood united with its international partners in condemning the Russian Federation's reprehensible actions, which violated international law and had had a devastating humanitarian impact on vulnerable people across the world. He called on the Russian Federation to end its invasion and withdraw its troops. He expressed deep concern at reports of the forced transfer of children from Ukraine to the Russian Federation and called for the Russian Federation to allow unimpeded access. He would welcome more insight from UNHCR as well as guidance on what further support the international community could provide on the matter.

68. The Office's work to strengthen international social protection systems remained vital. Its coordinated approach to the provision of cash and protection services was essential as national protection systems took over, and as an essential part of contingency planning. The continued efforts to strengthen the capacity of local civil society actors in that regard were also appreciated.

69. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** said that solidarity with Ukraine reflected a global aspiration to bring back peace and security to the country, as well as to address such issues as massive displacement. The sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine must be respected, and his Government supported the various economic efforts of the international community to contribute towards ending the war and restoring peace. In February, it had made a new pledge of \$130 million for 2023. External engagement and advocacy were important for mobilizing public support for refugees, and a proactive, targeted approach could be useful in regions and countries where displacement was not a mainstream issue.

70. The representative of **Switzerland** commended the response to the conflict in Ukraine from UNHCR and its partners, particularly its local partners, as well as from host countries. Several aspects of the UNHCR support for Ukraine were covered in the regional update for Europe, but there was no reference to the troubling increase in human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Although the Ukraine crisis was straining the reception capacities of several countries in Europe, the innovative practices that had been developed, notably the efforts to promote socioeconomic inclusion in host countries, could be used in response to other displacement crises around the world. While such good practices had been fully adapted to the humanitarian needs of the unprecedented displacement situation in Europe, it was important to ensure that they were not seen as an unfair difference in the treatment of Ukrainians compared to refugees from other countries.

71. UNHCR should support protection-sensitive border management. It would be useful to have further information about the situation at hotspots on the external borders of the European Union, as well as on the UNHCR approach to reports of expulsion. The regional update contained figures for refugees arriving in Europe in 2021 and 2022, but fewer refugees had arrived in Europe in 2020 and 2021 because of the COVID-19 crisis. It would therefore be more useful to have a comparison with the 2019 figures.

72. The representative of **Belarus** rejected the accusations made by the representative of Latvia. Belarus was not and had never been a participant in the Ukraine conflict in any way and had always called for a peaceful solution to be found. He also rejected the accusation that a migration crisis had been artificially generated. Any problems had already been resolved, with very active and effective support from UNHCR. However, it was important to recall the need for respect of the principle of non-refoulement, which remained an issue at the borders of his country.

73. The representative of **China** said that his country had always maintained an impartial position towards Ukraine and actively promoted peace negotiations. The Chinese Government had recently released a document outlining its comprehensive position on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis. Humanitarian assistance should be encouraged and supported, but must abide by the principles of neutrality and impartiality. Effective civilian protection required rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access. China supported the coordinating role of the United Nations in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the conflict area and was ready to work with the international community to promote a political solution to the crisis.

74. The representative of **Türkiye** thanked delegates for their expressions of solidarity with his country following the recent devastating earthquakes, one of the biggest disasters in its history. Close to 50,000 people had lost their lives, and hundreds of thousands had been injured. The disaster had also affected other countries and caused significant damage. He shared in the grief of UNHCR for its brave staff members who had lost their lives in the disaster. His country had mobilized all its capacity in response to the disaster in order to reach everybody in need, regardless of their background, and would continue to do so. Turkey would continue to abide by and passionately defend international refugee law. Due to the scale of the disaster, the United Nations had recently announced a flash appeal for slightly over \$1 billion for three months. The funding of the appeal had already begun, and a humanitarian coordination team had been formed and started its work, in cooperation with the Turkish authorities.

75. The representative of **Ukraine** (observer) said that it had been just over a year since the start of Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of his country. It had been a year of tremendous suffering and resilience, a year that had seen one of the largest displacement and humanitarian crises of modern times. Around 14 million Ukrainians – one third of the population – had been uprooted by the war, with 5.9 million internally displaced and a further 8 million seeking safety abroad. Diplomacy had been helpless in the face of aggression. The existing collective security had not worked. The silver lining was the unprecedented unity and solidarity from the country's neighbours, the whole of Europe and the world, determined to come to the aid of and offer protection to the innocent people who had lost everything in a moment. Around 4.9 million displaced Ukrainians had benefited from the European Union's temporary protection scheme or from similar schemes in other countries. Ukraine was grateful to all countries who had welcomed its people and would always remember their generosity and hospitality.

76. He commended UNHCR for its robust efforts to support his Government's response to the displacement and humanitarian crisis. The High Commissioner's recent visit to the country would surely maintain momentum for UNHCR assistance. As the Russian aggression was mounting, so were the humanitarian challenges ahead. It was estimated that 17.6 million Ukrainians – 40 per cent of the population – would need humanitarian assistance in 2023. Ukraine therefore welcomed the launch of the UNHCR-led Regional Refugee Response Plan and the supplementary appeal for 2023, and called on Member States and humanitarian organizations to provide the necessary funding for their effective implementation.

77. Continued focus on assistance and protection of internally displaced persons and returnees was essential. They continued to need emergency relief, cash assistance, sustainable housing, employment, protection and essential services. The Government of Ukraine was finalizing a new comprehensive strategy for internal displacement until 2025, incorporating durable solutions. He urged UNHCR to maintain its outstanding support for Ukrainian refugees, enhancing their self-reliance and livelihood opportunities through employment, entrepreneurship and targeted cash assistance, as well as promoting access to stable and affordable housing and basic services. Since about 90 per cent of refugees were women and children, it was also important to have a particular focus on child protection, the prevention of and response to gender-based violence, protection from exploitation, and the prevention of sexual abuse and trafficking.

78. Another serious concern was the situation of the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who had been deported by the Russian Federation to its territory, in violation of international humanitarian law. He called on humanitarian organizations including UNHCR to get full unhindered access to those people and facilitate their safe return to Ukraine, in accordance with the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 (Fourth Geneva Convention). Ukraine strongly condemned the 11 July 2022 decree of the President of the Russian Federation, which provided for a

simplified procedure for granting Russian citizenship to all citizens of Ukraine, particularly those residing in the temporarily occupied territories. That decision was yet another encroachment on Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, inconsistent with the norms and principles of international law. The forced issuance of passports to Ukrainian citizens was illegal and would not stand.

79. Another priority for Ukraine was ensuring the safe return of deported vulnerable children, including those from institutional care, orphans and unaccompanied or separated children, and preventing their unlawful adoption or rehoming by Russia. Ukraine was gravely concerned by recent reports that Russia was operating a large-scale network of camps where around 6,000 Ukrainian children had been subjected to political indoctrination and military training, which constituted a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions.

80. The vast majority of displaced Ukrainians wanted to return home one day. The best way for that dream to come true was for Russia to stop its ongoing unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression. The Ukrainian President's 10-point peace plan provided a blueprint for achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine. He therefore called on UNHCR and its Member States to support its implementation, with particular focus on its humanitarian dimensions.

81. The representative of **Impact Initiatives** (NGO group statement) said that the year-long armed conflict in Ukraine had profound and enduring effects worldwide. The grave humanitarian repercussions of the conflict included the forced displacement of nearly one third of Ukraine's population and thousands of civilian deaths. The European response to the unfolding humanitarian crisis had been effective and proactive, with UNHCR, European States and NGOs working together to meet the most urgent needs. The historic implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive in the European Union, and similar schemes in other countries, had enabled Ukrainian refugees to access legal status and rights.

82. He had four key recommendations to propose to UNHCR and Member States in order to continue and extend the good practices implemented in Ukraine to all those who were experiencing forced displacement or were seeking international protection. The first was to ensure sustained support for those who had been affected by the conflict in Ukraine, including investment in integration and protection solutions beyond the expiry of the Temporary Protection Directive in 2024, as well as sustainable economic and social inclusion. Appropriate resourcing of domestic refugee hosting should not come at the expense of the aid budget for other displacement crises. While the facilitation of UNHCR partnerships would continue to be critical for sustained solidarity, those partnerships were not always accessible for NGOs and local actors, based on the experience in Ukraine. Several challenges had sometimes prevented NGOs from operating efficiently, including cumbersome top-down partnership requirements that had hindered partners' access to funds, particularly local first response NGOs. A leaner partnership process should therefore be developed for situations of acute emergency.

83. The second recommendation was to uphold human rights law for all those seeking international protection in Europe. While immediate assistance was being offered to Ukrainians, others seeking protection in Europe continued to face an opaque and under-resourced asylum system, alongside violations of their rights, pushbacks, detention and abuse at border crossings. In 2022, there had been large numbers of deaths in attempted Mediterranean crossings, while at European external borders, measures had been imposed against NGOs, effectively preventing humanitarian agents from saving lives. Such measures included legislation to curtail certain rescue missions, forcing NGOs to choose between leaving people stranded at sea and risking large fines and the impoundment of vessels. Recent attempts to put humanitarian search and rescue workers on trial were a step towards criminalizing life-saving aid. Another matter for concern were States' attempts to externalize protection responsibilities by offshoring asylum to third countries.

84. The third recommendation was to demonstrate stronger humanitarian leadership in the world's most severe crises. Beyond Europe's borders, crisis-affected people were grappling not only with the effects of the conflict in Ukraine, including food shortages and rising prices, but also with the scarcity of resources. Needs were growing, both in scale and severity, in many crises worldwide. In 2022, forced displacement had reached unprecedented levels, with multiple disease outbreaks, natural disasters and a global food crisis. NGOs called for evidence-based prioritization and the allocation of humanitarian funding to ensure adequate resourcing of responses according to the level of need. He urged the European Union and donor States to deliver life-saving support to the world's most vulnerable people.

85. The fourth recommendation was to strengthen efforts to address statelessness. There were currently over half a million stateless people in Europe who were often living on the margins of society and denied access to their fundamental rights. NGOs were concerned by the absence of an adequate policy response on the part of European States, most of which lacked dedicated procedures to identify and protect stateless people in their territories.

86. Similarly, some children born in Europe to migrant refugee parents were currently exposed to the risk of statelessness. NGOs called on European States to implement their international obligations to ensure that all stateless children born in their territory acquired a nationality. The years 2023 and 2024 were a pivotal window to increase momentum towards meeting the #IBelong Campaign objectives to eradicate statelessness by 2024 and implement the pledges of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

87. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe** (UNHCR) expressed gratitude for the support offered for work in relation to Europe, including Ukraine and Türkiye. She confirmed that localization was a major aspect of the Office's work in Ukraine. UNHCR worked with some 148 national partners under a refugee response plan and had supported over 200 community-based entities in 22 oblasts in 2022. It also had national- and regional-level memorandums of understanding and remained strongly committed to working closely with NGOs.

88. Responding to members' comments on operationality, she said that in the last week alone, UNHCR had participated in 12 inter-agency humanitarian convoys to bring life-saving supplies to 72,000 people located within 20 km of the frontline. The protection strategy relating to Ukraine was regularly updated. While UNHCR remained committed to supporting States with their efforts in refugee inclusion, the majority of those refugees wished to return home at some point. She thanked the representative of Bulgaria for noting the importance of the education of refugee children, bearing in mind the need for those children to retain links to their national roots. She thanked the observer for the European Union for recognizing Georgia's role in supporting Ukrainian refugees and confirmed that UNHCR had taken steps to include Ukrainian refugees in Georgia in all aspects of its engagement in social and legal welfare, cash provision and protection.

89. UNHCR would continue to seek access to internally displaced persons, refugees and all affected populations, wherever they were, and in that context, it would seek access to all populations of concern in the Ukrainian crisis. Similarly, UNHCR remained committed to its child protection obligations, governed by the best interests of the child. She counted on the Russian Federation to maintain and strengthen its engagement with UNHCR, especially regarding meaningful access to all refugees, including children, who continued to remain under the mandate of UNHCR. That also applied to the sharing of data, which had been interrupted in October 2022.

90. Responding to members' comments about Europe in general and questions on border management in a protection-sensitive manner, she said that UNHCR had made a number of proposals on fair and efficient border and protection-sensitive border management. One of the issues that currently concerned UNHCR was the potential denial of asylum on the basis of irregularity of arrival and without consideration of an individual's circumstances. UNHCR wished to continue to discuss that matter with concerned States.

91. Responding to members' comments on refugee-led organizations, she said that UNHCR intended to use the consultations with European NGOs in 2023 for more in-depth discussions and engagement with refugee-led organizations throughout Europe. With regard to the expressions of support in relation to the earthquakes in Türkiye, she said that UNHCR had cooperated very closely and would continue to do so, with the relevant official bodies on all aspects of the management of persons of concern, including the monitoring of returns and access to territory. Its advocacy and operational engagement had been, during the emergency phase, targeted at all affected populations, irrespective of who they were, including host families of refugees. Moving from the immediate response to the mid-term response, however, UNHCR would be increasing its support to Türkiye to provide assistance to affected refugees in particular.

iii. Middle East and North Africa

92. The **Director of the Bureau of Middle East and North Africa** (UNHCR), presenting an update on the UNHCR operations in the Middle East and North Africa, expressed condolences to the people of Türkiye following the earthquake in the region. While UNHCR had been able to deliver 3,300 tents and 30,000 core relief items in all areas of the Syrian Arab Republic and was providing cash for minor building repairs, more substantial support was needed to rebuild homes and services. Despite the political challenges involved, especially regarding reconstruction inside the Syrian Arab Republic, it was necessary to find a way forward: people affected by the earthquake needed and deserved help to rebuild their lives, irrespective of where they lived.

93. The earthquake had come at a time when resources were already stretched. With a 20 per cent budget cut in major emergency operations, 2023 had already gotten off to a difficult start. The region continued to struggle with protracted conflicts in the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya and Yemen, an economic crisis with a multitude of consequences in Lebanon and other host States struggling to maintain financial resources, not least Jordan and Egypt. While the international community had provided a great deal of support for the region, more was unfortunately needed. Without predictable support to host governments and funding of

aid programmes – combined with political solutions addressing the causes of displacement – displaced people would descend further into poverty.

94. One of the critical concerns in the Middle East and North Africa was the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which had entered its twelfth year. Inside the country, more than 15 million people required assistance. The focus was on building self-reliance and reducing protection risks through community-based networks, alongside early recovery projects within the agreed humanitarian framework. Over 5.5 million Syrian refugees continued to be generously hosted by neighbouring countries amid worsening socioeconomic conditions. Some 90 per cent of Syrian refugee families were living in extreme poverty and in critical need of assistance to survive. Host communities were also struggling after the combined shocks of COVID-19, Ukraine and the subsequent economic downturns. The situation was likely to worsen during 2023, with no real solution in sight. Approximately 51,000 Syrian refugees had opted to return home in 2022, however, which was a slight increase on previous years.

96. In Yemen, the political and security landscape remained complex and uncertain. In 2022, the number of internally displaced persons had reached over 4.3 million, almost 75 per cent of whom were women and children. The ongoing blockade had pushed more than 75 per cent of the population below the poverty line. Yemen also hosted 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. UNHCR continued to provide critical protection services, including legal assistance, and supported the Government in its work on civil status determination and registration. Cash assistance remained a critical protection tool.

97. In Iraq, in consultation with the Government, United Nations entities were moving from an emergency response to a longer-term development approach. As of 2023, the clusters set up to address internal displacement had been deactivated and the humanitarian response plan would be discontinued. There would be a gradual phasing out of the humanitarian response for internally displaced persons and an increased focus on durable solutions under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. UNHCR would continue to maintain a strong focus on addressing the protection needs of the most vulnerable, while supporting the capacity of government services.

98. The economic and financial crisis continued in Lebanon, accompanied by the ongoing and rapid deterioration of living conditions for both Lebanese people and Syrian refugees, and social tensions prevailed. Over the past decade, Lebanon had done a great deal for refugees who represented 20 per cent of the total population, with all the implications for national identity and socioeconomic stability that that entailed. It was necessary to listen to and address Lebanon's concerns in that regard. The current political stalemate in the Syrian Arab Republic was generating costs and risks for neighbouring States. The implications of millions of Syrians staying even longer outside of their country, combined with reduced funding, were extremely serious, not only for refugees and host communities but also for stability in the region as a whole.

99. The security situation in Libya was complex, featuring bilateral hostilities between different armed groups which had intensified as the roadmap for holding presidential elections remained undetermined. While more internally displaced persons had returned home in 2022, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers remained at 40,000. Despite the restrictive operating context, UNHCR continued to provide critical protection services through a community day centre, while also ensuring life-saving assistance at detention centres and disembarkation points.

100. In Egypt, UNHCR would maintain vital services, including refugee status determination and resettlement. He welcomed the progress made by the Government of Egypt by enabling a joint platform on asylum and migration issues involving UNHCR and IOM and in further advancing a draft asylum law. In Algeria, the long-standing refugee situation in Tindouf distilled in a single operation many of the world's most significant challenges, in particular climate change and food and energy inflation. The cost of food for that particular population, which was entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance, had doubled in the past year. UNHCR was leading the preparation of a joint inter-agency and donor-supported humanitarian refugee response plan to try to increase available resources through showcasing good practices and generating new ideas for support.

101. The considerable funding, advocacy and support of donors had already provided protection to refugees and forcibly displaced persons, helping them to live in dignity and have hope for the future. However, the Middle East and North Africa region was going through difficult times, and there were more challenges ahead. Partnership between the international community and host countries was required, as well as a commitment by host countries to maintain and expand their protection space, with the support of donors. Concrete steps needed to be taken to address the causes of displacement in countries of origin and to reach political solutions.

102. The representative of **Egypt** (Arab group statement) expressed support for response efforts following the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic that would help mitigate the complex situation of displacement in the region. The Arab group expressed its regret at the increasing number of refugees and displaced persons across the world because of a failure to find solutions to conflicts and breakouts of new crises, with all their humanitarian ramifications. It was important not to overlook protracted humanitarian crises, and the need to prioritize dialogue and wisdom in seeking solutions and addressing the root causes of displacement.

103. The Arab group reiterated its firm commitment to protecting all refugees and displaced persons and providing them with all basic services and care on the basis of the burden- and responsibility-sharing principle, together with the aim of finding sustainable solutions for refugees. The group stressed the need for mixed migration flows throughout the region to be addressed through a comprehensive approach, especially in view of the complex security and political situation. Many countries in the region were transit and destination countries for irregular migration, which placed the burden on national authorities to address migration flows and control their borders and coasts. The Arab group reiterated the need to address the drivers of migration flows and to cooperate with national governments and agencies to find sustainable solutions.

104. The Arab group welcomed the progress made in such areas as safeguarding the rights of refugees, achieving equality, and securing solutions and political and financial support. It reiterated the need to seek sustainable solutions in a balanced manner and to address all challenges standing in the way of the safe return of refugees. The group expressed its concern, however, at the decrease in funding for UNHCR operations in the region, and at the fact that only 10 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements had been met. It called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards refugees and displaced persons and to expand unearmarked contributions to the budget in order to alleviate the burden on host countries, in line with the burden-sharing principle.

105. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement of the European Union and its member States) said that the European Union and its member States had deployed the full range of emergency support tools at their disposal following the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, were providing support to both government-controlled and non-government controlled areas of Syria and had pledged additional humanitarian funding for both countries. The earthquake had hit an area that was already hosting a significant number of refugees and internally displaced persons in vulnerable situations; he thanked the Turkish authorities for providing temporary waivers to Syrians who wished to return home while retaining their residency permits in Türkiye.

106. After 12 years of conflict, the Syrian crisis was still far from being solved and had been compounded by the earthquake. It was important to provide assistance to people in need in all areas of the Syrian Arab Republic. He welcomed the opening of new border crossings for humanitarian aid between Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic and hoped that the arrangements would be respected and expanded to improve access and delivery. Internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic were highly vulnerable, especially in the north of the country, and the Office's efforts to provide shelter were more necessary than ever. He welcomed the work of UNHCR on protection services, which should be scaled up, and reiterated the importance of ensuring that return was voluntary, safe and dignified. He stressed that European sanctions did not impede life-saving assistance to the Syrian people in response to the earthquake, did not prohibit the export of food, medicines or medical equipment, and did not target the country's health care system. It was key to explore how, collectively, humanitarian aid could be further facilitated and expedited.

107. He commended the Syrian Arab Republic's neighbouring host countries for their long-standing generosity towards refugee communities, despite the current economic challenges. The European Union continued to provide significant support to refugees as well as host communities. Refugees in hosting countries should preserve their rights, including the right to registration, documentation, decent living conditions and adequate access to basic services. At the same time, in Lebanon, more support to the Lebanese population was needed to mitigate the consequences of the compounded crises. In Jordan, the protection of refugees, regardless of nationality, remained a priority, and the registration of non-Syrian refugees should resume.

108. In Yemen, the operating environment was deteriorating in both the north and south, and after eight years of conflict, the living conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers were also deteriorating. It was critical to maintain a united voice among all actors involved in humanitarian diplomacy, and he appreciated the Office's focus on persons in vulnerable situations. He expressed concern at the enforcement by Houthis of the mahram requirement and drew attention to the need to ensure proper humanitarian access to women and girls in need. Underlining the severity of the needs of refugees and migrants from the Horn of Africa, he welcomed the joint IOM-UNHCR strategy in the refugee and migrant multi-sector.

109. He thanked UNHCR for strengthening coordination among protection partners in Iraq; more cooperation was needed, however, to avoid overlaps. The key role played by UNHCR in addressing the status of stateless internally displaced persons was to be commended, as was its cooperation with the Kurdistan regional government to find durable and dignified solutions for those residing in camps for internally displaced persons. The UNHCR presence in Libya provided significant support to refugees and asylum-seekers, including refugee status determination, registration, emergency evacuations to Rwanda and Niger, protection and health services, and distribution of cash, food and non-food items. The European Union and its member States fully supported the recent call by the United Nations Secretary-General to respect international refugee law and for Libyan authorities to find rights-based alternatives to detention. They encouraged the rapid conclusion of joint work to revitalize the African Union, European Union and United Nations Tripartite Taskforce for Libya.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.
