

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

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Summary record,* Wednesday, 8 March 2023, at 10.05 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Cristian Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

1. The **Chairperson** of the meeting (Second Vice-Chairperson of the Executive Committee), after calling the meeting to order, reminded the Committee that 8 March had been designated International Women's Day to celebrate the full and equal participation of women in every sector of society. Every single person, wherever they might be, had a part to play in challenging gender stereotypes, calling out discrimination, drawing attention to bias, and striving in a collective effort to foster positive change and build a more inclusive world.

Regional activities and global programmes (*continued*)

a. Regional updates (*continued*)

iii. Middle East and North Africa (*continued*)

2. The representative of **Jordan** said that his country's strong partnership with UNHCR had made it possible to host and assist over 1.3 million Syrian refugees in spite of the serious economic challenges affecting the provision of education, water, sanitation and hygiene services, among others. Jordan was determined to ensure that its refugee response plan for the Syrian crisis, which had been extended into 2023, complemented other national plans and projects, taking into account the Global Compact on Refugees. The response plan, however, had only received 33 per cent of the necessary funding, and his Government urged the international community to help it to cover the shortfall. Its return programme, too, remained a significant challenge, with very few refugees having returned home, and the international community was urged also to fully meet its responsibilities in terms of funding for repatriation.

3. Jordan would be participating in the second Global Refugee Forum and had high hopes of positive outcomes in terms of ensuring support to meet the refugees' needs and enable their return, including adequate financial support that was tailored to the needs of host countries and communities.

4. The representative of **Norway**, noting that it had been one month since the first powerful earthquakes had hit Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, causing widespread suffering and destruction, said that the humanitarian needs in the affected regions would remain significant for a long time to come. After more than a decade of conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, resulting in one of the biggest displacement crises in the world, the earthquakes had increased the number of internally displaced persons in the country by over 5 million. Norway commended UNHCR for its rapid response and recognized that access had been severely impeded by the damage caused.

5. With the preliminary findings of the 2022 vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon having shown a sharp decline in their living conditions, with 90 per cent of Syrian families found to be in extreme poverty and critical need of assistance, more information from the Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa on the reasons for that situation would be appreciated.

6. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** commended UNHCR for its response to the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic in coordinating the provision of core relief items and protection to internally displaced persons and refugees; the United Kingdom, for its part, continued to provide life-saving assistance as part of that response. Her delegation was keen to hear the views of the Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa region on the challenges of delivering on the Office's protection priorities and where the international community could best contribute to the transition from crisis response to rebuilding.

7. Her delegation would welcome the UNHCR assessment of anticipated migratory flows from the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic following the earthquake as well as the onward migration into Europe. Any further information on the United Nations' efforts to maintain a presence in that area of the country and the extent of UNHCR participation would also be welcome.

8. Commending UNHCR for its continued leadership of the camp coordination and camp management cluster (CCCM), the United Kingdom encouraged it to participate in the medium-term strategy for the al-Hol camp led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and would welcome any updates on the plans as well as on the Regional Operational Framework for Refugee Return to Syria. After more than a decade since the start of the Syrian crisis, the situation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon continued to deteriorate and the prospects for large-scale, dignified, returns looked remote. The United Kingdom, which was acutely aware of the impacts of Lebanon's growing economic crisis on both the Lebanese and the Syrian refugee populations, was committed

to providing humanitarian assistance based on the needs and recognized the critical importance of working together to preserve the protection space for refugees while challenging negative rhetoric and practices and continuing to advocate for more sustainable conditions. Her Government welcomed the recent arrival of the UNHCR incoming Representative to Lebanon and looked forward to working with him and his team in that country.

9. The United Kingdom also welcomed the Office's focus on durable solutions to the internal displacement situation in Yemen and requested an update on its coordination with the authorities and other humanitarian and development actors, as well as on its work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and others to address the quality issues identified in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) humanitarian evaluation of the Yemen crisis. Given the scale of the crisis, a strong protection cluster was needed in Yemen and a tangible, outcome-focused plan should be developed to address the protection issues in 2023.

10. The representative of **Denmark**, aligning her delegation with the statement delivered by the representative of the European Union and extending its condolences to the Turkish and Syrian people affected by the recent devastating earthquakes, said that her country had been quick to mobilize a response and would continue to maintain its solidarity and support, including to UNHCR, adding that its total contribution to date stood at 19 million euros. With the humanitarian situation in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic likely to worsen, the growing humanitarian needs would have an impact on the entire region. UNHCR was to be commended for its tireless efforts in providing protection and relief to the millions affected.

11. Denmark encouraged UNHCR to maintain a strong focus on the prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as the promotion of gender equality, across the region.

12. In view of the devastating number of deaths at sea in 2022 and the fact that so many people were putting themselves in the hands of people smugglers in an effort to reach Europe, creative collective thinking was needed to address the issue of irregular migration, and reform the European asylum system and the solutions must ensure respect for human rights and international law.

13. The eight-year war in Yemen had caused one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises, and the Office's work in such challenging circumstances was commendable. Any constraints on humanitarian assistance were unacceptable, and women, who were key to humanitarian action on the ground, must not be excluded from its delivery. Denmark would continue to strongly support the people and host communities affected by the humanitarian and refugee crisis across the region.

14. The representative of **Japan** expressed concern that the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic had occurred in an area affected by ongoing humanitarian crises and subject to severe insecurity, adding that the activities of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors in the field were highly appreciated. Japan continued to work with the international community to improve the humanitarian situation. His Government had provided \$10 million in funding for a humanitarian project in the Syrian Arab Republic and its neighbouring countries the previous December, and had just announced a further \$18.5 million for the response to the earthquakes, including a \$1.7 million contribution to UNHCR. It had also decided to provide \$5.3 million to UNHCR for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons, returnees and Syrian refugees in Iraq, whose newly elected Government was to be commended for its anti-corruption campaign and focus on economic reform, job creation and women's empowerment.

15. The representative of **Finland**, aligning his delegation with the European Union statement, said that Finland stood in full solidarity with Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic in the face of the loss of life and devastation caused by the recent earthquakes. Both those countries had been in the grip of a humanitarian crisis involving significant numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, and his Government had responded with financial support to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, for instance, and the provision of material and capacity support within the framework of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Finland expressed appreciation to Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan and the other countries hosting Syrian refugees, in spite of their economic difficulties and other crises. Humanitarian actors must have safe access to all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure that the assistance reached those most in need.

16. The humanitarian situation in Yemen, notwithstanding the respite of a six-month truce, remained dire: some two-thirds of the population was in need of humanitarian aid and the deteriorating living conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers were concerning.

17. Humanitarian aid must be delivered and protection provided throughout the region without discrimination and in accordance with international humanitarian law. Underfunding remained a major concern. It was essential to focus on the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, who were often left behind, and UNHCR, in its lead role in the Global Protection Cluster, was encouraged to ensure disability inclusion in its work at the country level, with the involvement of the persons concerned and their organizations.

18. Finland reiterated its commitment to supporting UNHCR in the region.

19. The representative of **Sweden**, aligning her delegation with the European Union statement, said that the extensive destruction of communities and forced displacement caused by the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic had exacerbated the suffering of people already in dire need of assistance. Sweden appreciated the Office's rapid response in that context and stressed the importance of additional support to the countries affected, as well as the neighbouring countries that had generously continued to host Syrian refugees. As President of the Council of the European Union, Sweden looked forward to co-hosting an international donors' conference to mobilize support for Türkiye and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic. In view of the damage done to essential services in Türkiye, including schools and hospitals, and the strain placed on the public authorities, UNHCR had a key role in leading the protection work and ensuring that the large population of Syrian refugees there was not marginalized in the response to the earthquakes. Her delegation would welcome the Office's assessment of how it would be able to respond to and minimize the increasing protection risks in the Syrian Arab Republic, including that of gender-based violence, as well as whether the extent of the damage to existing shelters was such that it anticipated having to revert to a "tent response".

20. On the situation in Yemen, which remained one of the biggest humanitarian emergencies in the world, the estimated 21 million people in need must not be forgotten. The \$1.1 billion in life-saving assistance raised at the recent humanitarian pledging conference in Geneva that Sweden had co-hosted with Switzerland and the United Nations Secretary-General had shown the strength of global solidarity, but more funding would be needed for Yemen throughout the rest of the year. Further information would be welcome on whether the nearly 100,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Yemen had access to adequate services.

21. The representative of **Egypt** expressed concern at the increasing numbers of forcibly displaced persons in the region and the fact that nearly 200,000 – 60 per cent more than in 2021 – had registered with UNHCR. That, combined with the level of underfunding, reflected the sad reality for refugees and their host communities, and underscored the need for durable solutions and equitable, sustainable burden- and responsibility-sharing. Her delegation commended UNHCR for its response to the growing needs of Syrian refugees and forcibly displaced persons, as well as the countries in the region that had continued generously to host over 5.5 million of them in the face of mounting socioeconomic challenges. Extending its condolences to those affected by the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, Egypt further underscored the need to support both those countries, together with the neighbouring countries that were expecting to receive increased flows of forcibly displaced persons.

22. Egypt had long provided refugees and asylum-seekers with protection and the same basic services as its own citizens, and was currently host to over 290,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, nearly 50 per cent of them Syrians, as well as a further 9 million people, including 1.5 million Syrians, in refugee-like situations. Funding levels, however, remained low, as Egypt had received just 3.2 per cent of the total budget for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and there was a 62 per cent funding gap for UNHCR operations in the country. An upsurge in mixed movements due to irregular migration and human trafficking had further increased the burden on her Government.

23. Egypt welcomed the progress achieved in various impact areas and stressed the need for a balanced approach to finding durable solutions for refugees and others in need of protection that placed equal emphasis on resettlement and complementary pathways, addressed the root causes of displacement and enabled safe, voluntary returns.

24. The representative of **Germany**, aligning his delegation with the European Union statement, commended the countries of the Middle East and North Africa region for their continued solidarity and exemplary responsibility-sharing in hosting large numbers of refugees and displaced persons.

25. In Iraq, while the improved displacement situation made it appropriate to phase out the humanitarian response for internally displaced persons and focus on durable solutions under the

United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), his Government recognized that there were still humanitarian and protection challenges to be addressed and would continue to fund the important work of UNHCR in the country in 2023. Germany's commitment to Iraq and the Iraqi people remained strong, as reflected in the current visit by its Minister of Foreign Affairs.

26. Regarding the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen, Germany had pledged a further 120 million euros to support the response at a donor conference the previous week and welcomed the Office's comprehensive assistance and protection programme and continued provision of cash assistance. His delegation encouraged UNHCR to support the newly established nexus coordination structure and expressed concern at the increased enforcement of the *mahram* policy that not only denied women the right to equal participation in the humanitarian system but also prevented women and girls from having access to humanitarian assistance unless accompanied by a male relative.

27. Germany deeply regretted the loss of life in the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic and had already announced an additional 10 million euros in support of the Office's response. Working conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic had been difficult before the disaster, and Germany welcomed efforts to provide life-saving assistance to internally displaced persons in accordance with the "whole of Syria" approach, including through the vital lifeline of cross-border mechanisms. UNHCR was also to be commended for its principled position in Lebanon and for enabling refugees in Jordan to live in dignity. Germany would continue to provide substantial, flexible funding to the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries.

28. On the situation in Libya, Germany appreciated the Office's crucial work in providing life-saving assistance in detention centres in very challenging circumstances; it was important to ensure that international organizations had unhindered access to those facilities. Germany also valued the work undertaken on resettlement for the most vulnerable.

29. The representative of **Switzerland**, extending his delegation's condolences to the families of those affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, said that the disaster had further aggravated difficult situations already marked by multiple crises.

30. Switzerland appreciated the Office's focus on child protection, education and the provision of decent living conditions, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and hoped that the latest international calls to respond to the crises would bear fruit. In view of the disparities in the reception of refugees in the region, the question of third-country solutions was all the more relevant. His delegation commended the efforts to combat gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

31. UNHCR was also to be commended for its efforts to remain engaged with the Government of Iraq after the gradual withdrawal of the humanitarian system over the course of 2023. It was important, for instance, to continue to stand by the Government as it developed durable solutions for its 1.2 million internally displaced persons and for the Iraqis still living abroad. Switzerland would continue to support the work of UNHCR in the transition phase, which was crucial to the country's stability.

32. The representative of **Lebanon**, aligning his delegation with the Arab group statement delivered the previous afternoon by the representative of Egypt, said that the Syrian crisis, which was entering its twelfth year, was one of the largest forced displacement situations in the world and that neighbouring countries, such as his, had borne the brunt of the intractable challenges that it had posed. The crisis had been further exacerbated by the recent devastating earthquake, which had affected more than 8 million Syrians and caused the forced displacement of at least 400,000 more. His delegation, extending its condolences to the families of all those affected in both the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, called on the international community to scale up its humanitarian assistance and begin to consider early recovery projects that might help to mitigate the plight of the Syrian people.

33. Lebanon, with the support of UNHCR, had provided protection to forcibly displaced Syrians since the start of the conflict but the pressures on its infrastructure and society had become intolerable, contributing to an acute financial and economic crisis that had left both the displaced and their host communities in extreme poverty and vulnerability. International support, while commendable, remained insufficient, and the various appeals to assist his country had remained largely underfunded. Some 1.5 million Lebanese people were identified as being in urgent need of assistance, and many had joined the Syrians and Palestinians risking their lives on perilous migratory routes. While the serious threat to Lebanon's economic and social stability had put the country's

future survival in the balance, members of the international community appeared unwilling to explore new, more pragmatic approaches and to seek durable solutions, including safe and voluntary repatriation. Countries such as his should not be left to their fate, and emphasis should be placed on more equitable and predictable burden- and responsibility-sharing.

34. The representative of the **Republic of Korea** said that his country was actively engaged in the international community's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in response to the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, and he extended its condolences to those affected for their loss. The earthquakes had further aggravated the forced displacement situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and across the region, and the hope was that dialogue could be facilitated among the various stakeholders in order to create the conditions conducive to finding durable solutions.

35. Regarding the protracted crisis in Yemen, his Government had just promised to provide \$18.5 million in humanitarian assistance, including 18,000 tonnes of rice, at the recent pledging conference co-hosted by the United Nations and the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland. It was concerned, however, about the issue of access constraints hindering the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need and the fact that the prospects for a solution appeared remote. Development cooperation was key, and yet the complex political situation was preventing development actors from playing an active role in countries of origin. It was feasible, however, to carry out development activities in refugee-hosting countries, and the Republic of Korea was planning to launch two country-level projects aimed at strengthening the resilience and self-sufficiency of refugees in Egypt and Jordan. The projects, focusing on sustainable green economies for refugees and host communities, would be implemented in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) then expanded to other countries in the region.

36. The representative of the **United States of America**, extending his delegation's condolences to those suffering from the loss of life and devastation caused by the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, said that the United States was contributing \$185 million to the response. UNHCR was encouraged to continue to provide urgent cross-border assistance, and focus on early recovery efforts would be welcome.

37. Regarding the Syrian crisis, the United States, as the single largest donor, had provided more than \$15 billion in support for Syrian refugees and host countries since the start of the conflict. Conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic were not yet conducive to large-scale safe, voluntary and dignified returns, and UNHCR must continue to ensure that Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons were kept fully informed of the situation there before deciding to return. The United States was deeply concerned about efforts to pressure them into returning prematurely and commended UNHCR for continuing to provide them and their host communities with humanitarian assistance.

38. In Yemen, the United States, which had provided over \$5.4 billion to the humanitarian response to date, was concerned that increasing bureaucratic restrictions were impeding aid delivery, in particular the *mahram* requirement that prevented women and children – who were often the most vulnerable and most in need – from having access to the assistance without the presence of a male relative. All the actors, including UNHCR and IOM, must work together to prevent targeted attacks against migrants and address the conditions at border crossings.

39. In Iraq, the United States encouraged UNHCR to further develop its long-term planning for durable solutions to support voluntary local resettlement and integration or safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable returns. The Iraqi authorities, together with stabilization and development actors and donor governments, were urged to support UNHCR in implementing such solutions and addressing the needs of over 1.2 million Iraqi internally displaced persons. Sustainable local integration called for steps to register internally displaced persons in social safety nets, to restore infrastructure and to expand services in places of origin.

40. The United States was concerned about reports of arbitrary detention and acts of violence against migrants across North Africa, and urged the governments of countries with a long history of generously hosting and protecting refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants to work with UNHCR to protect and uphold the rights of people on the move.

41. The representative of **Austria**, aligning his delegation with the European Union statement and extending its sincere condolences to the people of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic suffering as a result of the recent earthquakes, said that his country had deployed 82 members of its armed forces disaster relief unit to the region, together with Austrian search and rescue teams; that Austrian civil society organizations were providing assistance on the ground; and that more than

2,000 camp beds and blankets, 200 heating devices, 2,000 hygiene kits and 150 winter-proof tents had been delivered, together with \$3 million euros from the Austrian disaster relief fund. Austria would continue to do its best to provide humanitarian assistance and alleviate the suffering of the affected communities. Humanitarian access to all in need, no matter where they lived, was crucial.

42. On the Syrian crisis, which had entered a twelfth year of continuous, widespread violence and brutal violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, producing an estimated 8.9 million refugees, 6.9 million internally displaced persons and more than 500,000 fatalities, Austria was concerned that the humanitarian situation, despite a lull in the fighting, had continued to deteriorate and that the lack of a political solution made it impossible to rebuild the country's infrastructure and revive its economy. His Government, which was grateful to neighbouring countries for their long-standing generosity in hosting millions of refugees in spite of their own social and economic challenges, had contributed 2 million euros to the UNHCR operations in Jordan and 1 million euros to those in Lebanon.

43. Austria appreciated the Office's activities to empower women and girls and provide comprehensive support to the survivors of gender-based violence, including through access to sexual and reproductive health services. It also appreciated the prioritization of the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers and its commendable work to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities were taken into account. As a party to the United Nations statelessness conventions and a member of the group of friends of the #IBelong campaign, Austria welcomed all the measures taken by UNHCR to reduce statelessness and protect stateless communities.

44. The representative of **Yemen** said that the humanitarian crisis in his country was entering its ninth year and that the conditions endured by the Yemeni people owing to the intransigence of the Houthi movement were dire. More than 85 per cent of the population were in need of emergency assistance owing to a scarcity of food and medicine. Around 5.5 million internally displaced persons had fled conflict-affected areas and his Government was endeavouring to protect them and create the conditions conducive to their voluntary return. All were in urgent need of support from the international community, in particular pregnant women, widows, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable persons. Moreover, the Houthi had been impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid and diverting it from those most in need of assistance. Yemen was grateful to UNHCR and the Governments of Japan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for their support and called on UNHCR, donor organizations and the international community to step up their support.

45. Notwithstanding the difficult circumstances, Yemen remained committed to complying with the international instruments concerning refugees, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. As a host country granting refugee status to persons from the Horn of Africa and from other Arab countries, Yemen treated all refugees and migrants as equals. More support was needed, in line with the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing; indeed, all developing countries dealing with refugee crises would benefit from having access additional resources.

46. The representative of the **Sudan**, extending his delegation's condolences to those affected by the earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, said that his country stood in solidarity with all refugees in the Middle East and North Africa, especially the Syrians and Yemenis fleeing the protracted crises in their homelands. In regard to Iraq, Sudan supported the extension of projects in the transition from emergency response to durable solutions.

47. Sudan thanked UNHCR for its work in the region and stressed that it was important to provide further humanitarian assistance, particularly to the host communities enduring harsh conditions.

48. The representative of **Morocco**, extending his delegation's condolences to Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic for the impacts of the recent earthquakes, said that Morocco, as a transit country, was gradually welcoming more refugees and asylum-seekers and pursuing efforts to facilitate their access to education, employment and health care. The increase in mixed movements in the region was a matter of concern, and his Government had taken steps to tackle the illegal passage facilitated by human trafficking networks, including through training programmes for border and law enforcement officers launched in cooperation with UNHCR. Morocco had plans to co-sponsor the publication of a training guide on a human rights-based approach to migration and called on other Mediterranean States to join the initiative.

49. Humanitarian access to the refugee camps of Tindouf was continually and deliberately obstructed by the host country, which was responsible, in keeping with its obligations and the provisions of international humanitarian law, for guaranteeing that access was safe and unlimited.

UNHCR must be allowed to proceed with the registration of the populations being forcibly detained in those camps.

50. The representative of **Iraq** (observer), aligning her delegation with the Arab group statement delivered the previous afternoon by the representative of Egypt, said that Iraq had made considerable progress in reducing the number of internally displaced persons thanks to the planning and political will of the Government with the support of international partners. After many difficult years, Iraq was finally on the path to stability and paving the way for safe, dignified and lasting solutions. Positive developments included the issuance of more than 95,000 substitute identification cards to displaced persons. Her Government, which took pride in the repatriation of more than 4,000 persons from a refugee camp, was keen to repatriate more to their places of origin and urged the international community to support it in that endeavour so as to avoid the negative consequences of an absence of solutions, such as increasing crime rates in the camps. Countries of origin, too, must make every effort to repatriate and reintegrate their citizens.

51. The representative of **Refugees International** (NGO group statement), extending condolences to the victims of the recent earthquakes in Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, said that timely action was critical to address the growing needs on both sides of the border between the two countries, including those of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

52. Refugees across the Middle East and North Africa region continued to face acute challenges. As conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic remained unsuitable for safe, voluntary and dignified returns, UNHCR must help to prevent any forced returns by expanding its return movement monitoring and information-sharing to support informed decision-making on the part of refugees. In the wake of the earthquakes, the cross-border mechanism, which was one of the few remaining options for the delivery of humanitarian aid, should be extended by a minimum of 12 months.

53. In response to anti-refugee rhetoric in Lebanon, UNHCR must engage with the Lebanese Government to prioritize social cohesion initiatives for refugees and host communities alike.

54. In Iraq, in the face of the closure of the refugee camps and the protection cluster, UNHCR must engage with the Government and ensure that protection gaps were closely monitored.

55. On the issue of migrants from North Africa seeking entry to Europe, UNHCR must focus not just on border management but also on the provision of legal complementary pathways and the promotion of temporary protection mechanisms that allowed for free temporary movement and access to basic services in Europe.

56. Meanwhile, United Nations agencies must invest in efforts to better understand, anticipate and mitigate the effects of climate change and disaster-induced displacement, as well as to build more resilient communities.

57. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Middle East and North Africa** (UNHCR), responding to the various comments and questions, said that as the conditions in the Syrian Arab Republic had only worsened in the wake of the tragic earthquake, the large-scale voluntary return of Syrian refugees from host countries was highly unlikely in the near future; UNHCR was grateful to those countries for their unwavering commitment to the principle of non-refoulement, regardless of their own challenges. The regional operational framework was being updated in the wake of the earthquake, and two additional border crossings had been opened and staffed to provide assistance to the entire population in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic. UNHCR was grateful to donors for responding to the flash appeal that it had launched, as their contributions had been key to the development of a response plan and the rapid delivery of meaningful support. Regarding the critical remarks about the Office's contribution to the search and rescue effort following the earthquake, it was important to note that the agency was only equipped to respond to requests for relief items, such as tents, of which 3,800 had been distributed to date and that it was now considering the next steps. Meanwhile, conditions in the north of Syria had made it difficult to establish a United Nations hub-style presence there, and UNHCR was working with other United Nations agencies and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to find a solution.

58. In Iraq, UNHCR was working closely with the Government to facilitate the return of all the displaced Iraqis in the al-Hol camp, including through pre-departure screening. It was also cooperating with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on the return of Syrian internally displaced persons – the second largest population group in the camp – and continuing to seek creative solutions for the persons of other nationalities that had not already been repatriated by their governments. On the question of information on the returnees, while gathering such information was generally difficult and treated with suspicion by the Syrian Arab Republic, the community centres

established by UNHCR around the country and run by national NGOs had proven useful in making data available on returnees' identities, dates of return and needs.

59. Regarding the deactivation of the protection cluster for internally displaced persons in Iraq, while UNHCR would continue to work with the Government of Iraq on some matters, such as the issuance of identification cards, while the humanitarian response was being phased out, responsibility for other matters, such as the procurement of winter fuel for the camps, would be handed over to the Government in view of its sustained progress towards greater stability.

60. On the situation in Yemen, the current *mahram* restrictions on access to unaccompanied women and girls and preventing the free movement of female UNHCR or NGO staff were indeed a problem, not just for delivering the humanitarian assistance but also because having women's views, as gathered in focus groups and meetings, was key to understanding the full picture in terms of a community's real needs. Those restrictions were relatively new and, in his view, more a matter of politics than ideology; there were women in senior positions in every area of Yemeni public life, and the issue could hopefully be resolved over time. The core issue in regard to activities concerning the many refugees that the country had been hosting remained that of underfunding. The 50 per cent budget cut in 2022 had had a major impact on staffing, delivery, the management of informal internal displacement settlements, the provision of shelters and the availability of crucial cash assistance. With further cuts expected in 2024, the question was whether the Office's presence alone, without the added value of adequate resources and expertise, could still make a difference.

iv. Americas

61. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas** (UNHCR) said that his region was facing an unprecedented displacement crisis, with every indication suggesting that population movements would only become more acute and add to the challenges in regard to human rights violations, political instability, social tensions and economic difficulties, which had been exacerbated by the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that had disproportionately affected refugees and migrants. The growing, increasingly complex, mixed migratory flows across the continent, notably in the Darién Gap and the Andean region, were of particular concern. In many cases, it was a matter of secondary movements of families that had achieved a level of stability in a country of destination but been forced to move again by job losses and evictions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Such movements not only placed additional pressures on communities but also created an impression of chaos and insecurity, generating discrimination and xenophobia. Many countries had applied new admission requirements and strengthened their border controls and the resulting lack of regular pathways had forced most of those on the move onto irregular routes, leaving them exposed to risks of people trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

62. Countries in the region were working together to develop a strategy to improve migration management, mitigate protection risks and promote greater stability for people and communities. There were three main priorities: strengthen protection systems at every stage of displacement; promote the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national programmes and policies; and ensure a coordinated humanitarian response where necessary.

63. Regarding the first priority, examples of progress at the national level had included the recent adoption of an internal displacement law in Honduras, whose implementation would be supported by UNHCR, and the prioritization of a "total peace" approach in Colombia, which aimed to tackle the root causes of conflict, carry out structural reforms and provide solutions for displaced and detained persons. Important work had been done within the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (known by its Spanish acronym, MIRPS) and on the strengthening of regulatory frameworks in Mexico and El Salvador. Many countries had introduced innovative systems granting legal status and protection to the refugees and migrants forming part of the mixed migratory flows. Brazil, Mexico and Paraguay, among others, had taken steps to modernize their asylum systems, decentralize the work of national refugee commissions and apply the extended definition of "refugee" contained in the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. Mass biometric registration and documentation campaigns had been carried out to ensure that the rights of migrant Venezuelans, in particular, were upheld, while several countries had introduced temporary protection and humanitarian visas for persons displaced due to natural disasters, climate events or socioeconomic factors. On the subject of statelessness, his Bureau was grateful to Spain and countries in the region for their efforts to find legal solutions for the Nicaraguans recently stripped of their nationality.

64. On the second priority, States participating in the Quito Process and MIRPS were focusing on socioeconomic inclusion, on access to health care and education, and on resettlement and employment programmes in which the role of both the private sector and the local authorities of “cities of solidarity” was key. Development actors, such as international financial institutions, had become increasingly involved in the promotion of inclusive policies in recent years, with UNHCR acting as a catalyst to build links with the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), including through its consultative role in the World Bank’s Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFE).

65. On the third priority, recent emergency operations in the border areas of Central America and Mexico had demonstrated the need to further strengthen the main humanitarian response plans. The Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) was an excellent example in that it gave civil society and refugee- and migrant-led associations a key role in the management of humanitarian assistance programmes. UNHCR also participated actively in the implementation of humanitarian response plans, notably in the communities receiving Venezuelan returnees and those affected by climate events in northern Central America.

66. The coordination mechanisms established to enhance responsibility-sharing and mobilize the support of the international community included the Quito Process, which sought to promote protection and inclusion across the region, and MIRPS, which was the main mechanism for addressing forced displacement in Central America and Mexico; the efforts to increase international cooperation through the MIRPS Support Platform’s solidarity conferences were particularly welcome. UNHCR was committed to supporting the implementation of the Declaration on Migration and Protection (also known the Los Angeles Declaration) as a key means of developing a common approach, and the establishment of multiple regular pathways for international protection and migration was a clear expression of regional responsibility-sharing.

67. Meanwhile, the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 would be an opportunity to reaffirm the region’s commitment to the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and showcase best practices; to elicit pledges from States, civil society, the private sector and humanitarian and development actors; and to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration, for which a road map would be developed to address contemporary issues and promote innovative solutions in the spirit of solidarity, cooperation and shared responsibility.

68. The representative of **Paraguay** (Americas group statement) expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its work in a context of multiple protracted crises marked by increasing numbers of refugees and forcibly displaced persons and growing vulnerability. States in his region had nonetheless responded to the combined effects of conflict, climate change and financial and food crises with solidarity, hospitality and respect for the human rights of those in need of international protection, as demonstrated by the various cooperation mechanisms facilitated by UNHCR and implemented with a view to enhancing burden- and responsibility-sharing at the regional and subregional levels.

69. The likelihood of a further rise in the vast number of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in the Americas in 2023 due to the global financial crisis and climate events was concerning, and close attention must continue to be paid to the complex humanitarian situation and mixed movements on migratory routes in Central America, the Darién Gap and elsewhere in the region. Many States had best practices to share in terms of regularization, protection and inclusion; they required greater support from the international community. Many were also striving to promote the socioeconomic integration of refugees through programmes providing access to education, health care and the labour market. All must respect the principle of non-discrimination and implement measures to combat racism and xenophobia and guarantee the human rights of every person of concern to UNHCR.

70. In a context of ever deeper and more complex crises, the underfunding of operations in the region was concerning and called for more resources from the international community. States in the Americas remained committed to working together to strengthen the multilateral approach and upholding the principles of the international protection system to ensure the full protection of all refugees and asylum-seekers and relieve the pressures on host and transit communities. They were ready to contribute actively to the preparations for the next Global Refugee Forum.

71. The representative of the **European Union** (group statement of the European Union and its member States) said that it shared the concern of UNHCR about the persistently high levels of forced

displacement and mixed movements in the Americas, and they commended it for its work and advocacy for protection and solutions.

72. While the crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela remained deeply concerning, it was encouraging to see States in the region paving the way for refugee protection and inclusion through, inter alia, the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela and the Quito Process, as well as the adoption of progressive, inclusive policies in regard to Venezuelans. The European Union and its member States, noting the increase in spontaneous returns to the country, requested more information from UNHCR on how it planned to support the local authorities and communities receiving refugees.

73. On the situation in Colombia, the European Union and its member States fully supported the ongoing peace dialogue and the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. While the prospect of further displacements due to clashes between irregular armed groups were concerning, Colombia's status as a pilot country under the United Nations Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement should help to resolve those challenges, including in urban areas, and UNHCR was to be commended for taking into account the disproportionate impact of the violence on Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. Noting that population movements through the Darién Gap were becoming increasingly dangerous, the European Union and its member States requested further details about the assistance that UNHCR was providing to those in need of international protection in that remote area and its cooperation with other aid organizations.

74. The situation in Central America and Mexico, where the impacts of forced displacement were compounded by climate events, food insecurity, economic shocks and violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, called for continued attention and support, as those conditions could further complicate the patterns of mixed movement and potentially drive more people to cross borders. The European Union and its member States, together with the United States, Canada, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Norwegian Refugee Council, had organized a "high-level solidarity roundtable" to support the 2023 humanitarian response plans for El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Still more funding was needed, however, and UNHCR was encouraged to engage with new donors and development actors and to facilitate interactions between the various coordination mechanisms in Central America and Mexico.

75. The summit between the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to be held in July 2023 represented an important opportunity to strengthen partnerships and joint efforts to strengthen peace and sustainable development in the region. UNHCR should continue to assist the most vulnerable forcibly displaced persons, in particular those from Nicaragua and Haiti. Good progress had already been made in terms of promoting inclusion and access to essential protection services, but further work remained to be done to expand access to education and find durable solutions.

76. The representative of **Argentina** stressed the need for a paradigm shift from a security and border controls-based to a holistic, human rights-based approach that placed migrants at the centre of government policies. Argentina, which had taken steps to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of their migration status, was seeking to improve current practices and its capacity to welcome those persons, with a particular focus on finding durable solutions. It was also in the process of preparing pledges for the Global Refugee Forum and looked forward to presenting examples of best practices at the event. Measures taken at the national level had included the development of a national resettlement plan and complementary pathways for the admission of refugees, stateless persons and persons in need of international protection; the introduction of a resettlement programme for Ukrainian citizens; and a range of activities to improve integration and reduce statelessness, with nationality recognized as a fundamental human right.

77. The representative of **Ecuador** said that the wide range of challenges at both the national and regional levels called for innovative, inclusive and multidimensional responses. The increased solidarity and cooperation of the international community was key to a responsibility-sharing approach to support countries such as his in their efforts to host, protect and integrate refugees and displaced and stateless persons. Renewed efforts were also needed to make progress towards the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees and the next Global Refugee Forum would be an opportunity to evaluate the successes, identify the remaining challenges and add new momentum to the Compact. Ecuador encouraged UNHCR to work with States in the region on the pillars of the Los Angeles Declaration, which would help to strengthen the Compact and show a clear commitment to improving coordination and supporting persons of concern.

78. His Government was working on a range of measures to support Venezuelan refugees and migrants, among others, including through the Working Group on Refugees and Migrants in Ecuador, which had presented the Ecuador chapter of the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela's response plan for 2023-2024. Given the importance of alleviating the pressures on host communities and developing systems to respond to the needs of people on the move, especially those in situations of vulnerability, UNHCR should work with States to strengthen cooperation and address high-risk situations. Ecuador was grateful to UNHCR for its work to guarantee the rights, safety and dignity of persons of concern in the region.

79. The representative of **Mexico** said that mixed migration movements should be managed through a rights-based approach, with constant dialogue between all the countries in the region. Safe, orderly and regular migration, with international protection provided to those that needed it, was a shared responsibility that called for action on several fronts. The vast number of people on the move in the Americas had highlighted the need to address the causes that led to people leaving their homes in search of international protection or better opportunities. The Los Angeles Declaration had provided a road map for improving regional dialogue, strengthening institutions, sharing best practices and ensuring humane, coordinated and shared management of borders and mobility. Some of those themes had been further developed at the North American Leaders' Summit, where Canada, Mexico and the United States had committed themselves to extending regular migratory pathways, addressing the root causes of forced migration and working together to combat xenophobia and discrimination. His Government had taken a range of measures to strengthen national asylum systems and to increase its capacity to integrate refugees, including through access to education, health care and employment opportunities. Mexico, as a member of MIRPS, remained committed to dialogue and coordination in Central America, including through collaboration with institutions such as the IDB. The Office's support was crucial to enabling States in the region to respond to the many challenges that remained to be addressed.

80. The representative of **Peru** expressed concern about the growing number of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in the region, many of whom were from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and in need of special support from national authorities and United Nations agencies in a context of increased spontaneous return movements. Peru continued to host large numbers of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, providing especially the most vulnerable with the necessary protections and assistance to integrate into Peruvian society. Political decisions to help those most in need, however, called for funding to cover the unbudgeted expenditures involved in managing the increasingly significant migratory flows. International cooperation, therefore, was crucial to providing host countries with effective, timely support to meet the needs of vulnerable migrants and the upcoming International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities would be an opportunity to provide that support and help to finance the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. Peru called on the international community to maintain its focus on the migration issues facing the region and reaffirmed its commitment to continuing, with the vital support of UNHCR and other actors, to seek solutions to the diverse range of challenges encountered by those refugees and migrants.

81. The representative of **Colombia**, expressing solidarity with the people of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic, said that her Government had dispatched a search and rescue team of 25 professionals and other forms of assistance to support the humanitarian response in the wake of the recent earthquakes.

82. In the light of the recent accidental deaths in the Darién Gap, more information would be welcome on UNHCR operations in the area, together with recommendations as to how countries could improve the humanitarian situation for those putting their lives and physical well-being at risk, particularly the women and girls.

83. On the internal displacement crisis in Colombia, where UNHCR had been working for over 20 years to assist 20 per cent of the population – over 8 million, mostly indigenous and Afro-Colombian, people – that had been forcibly displaced, her Government had recently adopted a national action plan and would continue to work with the Government of Canada on a range of assistance scenarios for internally displaced persons, including through a “group of friends for the internally displaced”. Every country should ensure the dignity and human rights of internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants and host communities.

84. On the Venezuelan situation, Colombia, in a spirit of solidarity and despite the challenges, had welcomed over 2.5 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants; guaranteed them access to the

same health care, education and protection services as its own citizens; and established the institutional and legal frameworks for their access to the local economy, integration and regularization. UNHCR had been a key partner in ensuring that they were informed about the temporary status mechanism, and more than 1.7 million temporary protection visas had been issued to date. Colombia had also benefited from the support of the international community in implementing programmes to assist them under various regional development plans. As the plans did not specifically cover the Venezuelan crisis or provide adequate funding for a regional response, Colombia was grateful to UNHCR for its key role in supporting and organizing the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities, to be held the following week in Brussels. The international solidarity needed to meet the challenge of mixed migratory flows in the Americas must be expressed not only in words but also in pledges to provide the necessary funding.

85. The representative of **Japan** said that his country, as co-coordinator of the second Global Refugee Forum, was working hand-in-hand with UNHCR and other partners to promote the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in the lead-up to the event, which it regarded as an opportunity to consider possible solutions to the world's humanitarian challenges.

86. His Government had provided \$4 million to UNHCR to help to protect and ensure the recognition of Venezuelan refugees in Peru and Brazil. It had also contributed to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, which also faced a number of humanitarian crises, helped to initiate infrastructure projects to promote sustainable development in the Americas and provided funding for the region's private sector. Japan would continue to support humanitarian assistance and sustainable development throughout the Americas region.

87. The representative of **Brazil**, noting the complexity and scale of the humanitarian challenges in the region, as reflected in the update on UNHCR operations, recalled that Brazil had a long-standing tradition of hosting refugees and migrants of a most diverse range of nationalities and considered it a duty to welcome and offer better living conditions to those forced to flee their countries by persecution, conflicts or crises. Her Government had just extended its unprecedented humanitarian visa policy to people from Afghanistan and Ukraine and continued to support Venezuelans through its "operation welcome" programme. Special attention had consistently been given to children, women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and indigenous persons as part of a response comprising full documentation, medical assistance and socioeconomic integration. Her delegation thanked UNHCR for recognizing Brazil's work in its presidency the previous year of the Quito Process.

88. Brazil was concerned about the decision of the Nicaraguan authorities to deprive more than 300 Nicaraguans of their citizenship. Reaffirming its humanitarian commitment to the eradication of statelessness and protection of the stateless, Brazil stood ready to welcome those affected by that decision.

89. Refugees and migrants in Brazil, regardless of their status, had access to all public services and social benefits, including education and health care. The adoption of a national migration, statelessness and asylum policy was a priority for the new administration, and a working group had been established to elaborate an integrated policy, in accordance with the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees, based on a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach. The outcome of the process would be announced towards the end of the year.

90. The representative of **Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)**, noting the assertion in the update on UNHCR operations in the Americas region that 211,000 of the more than 7.1 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants in other countries had been recognized as refugees and over 1 million had been recognized as asylum-seekers, said that that meant the remainder – just under 5.9 million – did not fall within the organization's mandate as they were not fleeing persecution or war. The growing tendency to make no distinction between economic migrants and refugees was a misuse of the legal framework governing the work of UNHCR and had had a negative impact on applications for international protection.

91. The migration issue must be tackled by addressing the structural causes of displacement, particularly in the Venezuelan case, which involved geopolitical conflicts of interest. The dubious use of methodologically or scientifically baseless statistics on Venezuelan migrants and refugees had, in recent years, contributed to a miscalculation of the true situation and a xenophobic stigmatization of Venezuelans that had made it harder for them to integrate into host communities. As UNHCR continued to produce reports that did not conduce to an objective interpretation of the

Venezuelan migration process and omitted exogenous causes, his Government called on the agency to make a greater effort to explain the structural causes.

92. Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) had recorded the highest economic growth in the region, with a 17.73 per cent increase in gross domestic product in 2022. That had resulted in large numbers of returns that must be taken into account in the Office's reports and assessments on the subject. Despite being the target of illegal and criminal, unilateral, coercive measures, his Government had established a "return to the homeland" repatriation and reintegration plan, and more than 250,000 Venezuelans to date had applied to return. An interparliamentary group of friends had been set up with the Government of Colombia to promote legal instruments to facilitate trade between their two countries and foster development and prosperity in border areas. It was a matter of some concern, however, to see that the discourse hostile to his country, and the Government continued to prevail in the lead-up to the following week's International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities. The principles of international humanitarian law with respect to refugees must be respected, which called for impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization.

93. Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) was ready to increase its cooperation with UNHCR on the basis of mutual respect and with emphasis on the protection of refugee status. To that end, it was essential to step up efforts to eradicate all manifestations of xenophobia, discrimination and racism and to ensure the strict respect of the human rights of refugees.

94. The representative of **Chile** drew attention to the fact that the world faced an extremely complex situation in which the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by an international economic crisis and climate emergency, had had a significant impact on the dynamics of displacement in all regions. Her Government was committed to addressing the challenges identified in the update on UNHCR operations in the Americas, both in its national capacity and in its role as President pro tempore of the Quito Process, under which governments were working together to enhance integrated border management, the role of local governments and host communities in migration management and coordination with other regional processes, while striving to maximize the use of resources and capacities by avoiding any duplication of initiatives. The 13 member States that had taken part in the first regional meeting of host communities and local government under Chile's presidency the previous week, together with the representatives of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process, as well as United Nations agencies, academics and civil society stakeholders, had shared their experience and best practices in areas such as women and child migrants, access to rights and socioeconomic integration.

95. The integration of refugees and migrants was key to the consolidation of an inclusive society, and their knowledge, skills and cultural inputs could make a significant contribution to national development. Her Government was striving to create a favourable environment for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in a context of mixed migratory flows by introducing new legislation and initiatives to ensure their harmonious social, cultural, political and economic inclusion and integration into Chilean society. Its human rights-based approach included measures to protect women, adolescents, children and other vulnerable or at-risk persons, in particular, and to guarantee the right to education. It was grateful to UNHCR for its assistance in the relevant policy-making.

96. Chile had been stepping up its commitment to gender equality since 2022, the national migration service had set up a gender unit and all state action was now focused on the development of a feminist agenda.

97. Her Government, expressing appreciation to UNHCR and other United Nations entities for helping to promote a regional agenda and programmes to respond to migratory movements, reaffirmed its commitment to protecting the status of refugees and asylum-seekers and fully guaranteeing their human rights at every level.

98. The representative of **Switzerland** expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its engagement with countries in the Americas, including those closely involved in the Quito Process, and underscored the importance of continuing to implement the Los Angeles Declaration until all of its core commitments had been met. Switzerland supported the development of the MIRPS Support Platform and the participation of the major development banks, which should help to facilitate the Office's efforts to find durable solutions. The World Bank's GCF facility, for instance, had made it possible for Costa Rica – a middle-income host country – to have access to public development assistance that would facilitate the reception and integration of refugees. That practice could be extended to others.

99. The issue of displaced Venezuelans was the biggest problem in the region and the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities to be held in Brussels the following week would be crucial to strengthening their protection and finding durable solutions.

100. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed gratitude to UNHCR and IOM for their leadership in coordinating regional responses to the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as well as to the countries in the region generously hosting the large numbers of refugees that continued to leave the country in search of better living conditions, security and access to health services; that, in a context of economic recovery at the regional level, was understandable yet concerning. Despite the gradual reopening of borders, a growing number of Venezuelans continued to use unsafe routes, such as through the Darién Gap, and her delegation was keen to know whether UNHCR had any updated projections on the situation for the rest of the year. It also requested an update on the Office's actions to ensure the protection of the increasing numbers of Venezuelan women and girls on the move, which, given that they were among the most vulnerable, was deeply concerning.

101. Her delegation commended UNHCR for its efforts to support the host countries taking steps to regularize the status of refugees and migrants and requested an assessment of the results thus far. Also, recognizing that the economic challenges facing domestic populations were fuelling a rise in xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes towards Venezuelan migrants and, hence, exacerbating an already difficult situation, the Office's views as to what could be done to tackle that challenge, including by partners, would be welcome. Its assessment of the increase in returnees to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, too, would be welcome, with a particular focus on whether the returns were permanent or temporary and how they were affecting wider population movements across the region.

102. The representative of **Canada**, expressing gratitude to UNHCR for its response to the Venezuelan situation in cooperation with IOM and through the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, said that Canada remained deeply concerned about the humanitarian and protection needs of the increasing numbers of refugees and others displaced by the crisis, as well as the internal conflict in Colombia and the situation in Central America. Her Government appreciated the technical assistance provided by UNHCR to promote the inclusion of persons of concern in national social protection systems and commended the countries in the Americas that, with the support of UNHCR and other humanitarian actors, had introduced innovative methods and technologies to enhance access to protection.

103. To highlight the humanitarian needs stemming from the Venezuelan crisis, Canada was determined to ensure that prominence was given to the voices of the refugees and migrants participating – alongside the representatives of donors, host countries, international organizations, civil society and the private sector – in the upcoming International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities that it was co-organizing with the European Union, with the support of UNHCR and IOM.

104. The high-level solidarity event hosted by the MIRPS Support Platform and led by Canada and the United States, in partnership with Honduras, on the margins of the seventy-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022 had raised \$210 million to address the needs of forcibly displaced persons in Central America and Mexico. Canada would remain engaged in the platform's work and continue to support the efforts of MIRPS member States on behalf of the forcibly displaced throughout the region.

105. The representative of **Spain**, aligning her delegation with the statement delivered by the European Union, said that the protection of the many millions of asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in the Americas would not have been possible without the work of UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations and United Nations entities and, above all, without the generosity of their host countries. The Office's work with IOM to address the situation of internally displaced Venezuelan in the La Gran Sabana region of the country, for instance, where they were virtually the only humanitarian actors present, had been exemplary.

106. Her country welcomed the convening of the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities the following week and hoped that the pledges made would help to overcome the underfunding problems and support the continuation of the host countries' commendable regularization programmes. Spain, for its part, had contributed a significant amount of funding for the period 2020-2024 to the Inter-Agency

Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela to support its efforts to address the crisis.

107. Her Government, concerned that 222 Nicaraguans had recently been stripped of their citizenship, had offered those persons Spanish nationality; statelessness, which affected more than 10 million persons worldwide, was a denial of a person's fundamental rights. Spain, as a member of the group of friends of the #IBelong Campaign, appreciated the efforts of countries in the Americas to eradicate statelessness.

108. Spain was deeply concerned about the continuing increase in mixed migratory flows and the vulnerability and risks to which those on the move were exposed – such as human trafficking, extortion and forcible disappearance in the Darién Gap – as well as the challenges faced by transit and host countries in providing the services to meet growing humanitarian and protection needs. Her Government supported the humanitarian operations being carried out on the ground and the relevant plans to improve national capacities to manage migratory flows, provide assistance and promote inclusion policies; priority must be given to the most vulnerable groups.

109. Spain commended the current North American presidency of the MIRPS Support Platform for its efforts to bring the Central American Bank into the platform's network of partners; the participation of more development stakeholders was a positive step towards alleviating the pressures on many member countries and addressing the root causes of the displacement crises.

110. Spain would continue to regard the Americas region as a priority, as reflected in its commitment, in its first month as President of the European Council, to organizing the first European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean summit to be held since 2015. Her Government hoped that the outcomes of the summit would help to make 2023 the year of the Americas in Europe.

111. The representative of **Paraguay** said that sustainable solutions to the challenges highlighted in the update on UNHCR operations in the Americas region called for a comprehensive, coordinated, response involving all the States and other stakeholders, in particular the private sector and international financial institutions.

112. His Government's 2018 law to reform its programme regularizing the legal status of stateless persons aimed to guarantee their human rights and those of asylum-seekers and ensure that both had access to assistance and basic services. In view of the importance underscored in the update of promoting a favourable environment for protection, another law had been passed in 2022 to add greater flexibility to the procedures and bring the country's legislation into line with the relevant international agreements, establishing new principles, guarantees and rights that were in keeping with its current migration policy.

113. All States must comply with the principle of non-refoulement to ensure that the human rights of all refugees and asylum-seekers, regardless of their migration status, were respected and their access to international protection was guaranteed.

114. The representative of the **United States of America** paid tribute to the continued efforts of UNHCR to strengthen access to protection for vulnerable people in the Americas region through its refugee resettlement operations and assistance in building asylum systems, supporting complementary protection schemes, facilitating solutions for the internally displaced, providing life-saving humanitarian aid and promoting local integration. His delegation, acknowledging the continued generosity of host countries in the region, expressed appreciation to the Government of Mexico for its ongoing efforts to provide protection to refugees and asylum seekers, which had made it the third largest receiver of asylum claims in 2022. It also appreciated innovative solutions to ensure access to protection and documentation assistance, such as the amnesty programme in Belize.

115. The endorsement of the Los Angeles Declaration had been an historic achievement that had mobilized the endorsing countries to work together to transform migration management and protection systems in the region, and the United States invited other countries to join them and the broader international community in the continued implementation of its commitments. In line with its own priorities under the declaration, the United States would continue to offer support through UNHCR and other partners to governments striving within the MIRPS framework to implement their respective action plans to respond to forced displacement. As the current Chair of the MIRPS Support Platform, the United States was showcasing examples of how displaced persons contributed to their host communities and promoting best practices for local integration as a durable solution. It invited like-minded States to join the platform in its efforts to advance the priorities of the Global Compact on Refugees in the western hemisphere in the lead-up to the second Global Refugee Forum.

116. On the situation regarding Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the United States paid tribute to Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay for having initiated asylum or legal-stay arrangements to provide those vulnerable persons with documentation and to enhance their access to basic services. UNHCR, too, was to be commended for its crucial support in striving to improve the lives of the millions of Venezuelans displaced across the region and in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. The increase in spontaneous return movements, with the corresponding humanitarian needs, protection and socioeconomic reintegration of returnees, together with readmission arrangements offering a pathway back to countries of refuge were two particular areas of interest. The United States, as a member of the Group of Friends of the Quito Process, looked forward to attending the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities, co-hosted by the European Union and Canada, and endorsed the stated objectives, including that of keeping international attention focused on the protracted crisis.

117. On the Nicaragua situation, where the crackdown on political opposition and free speech had caused untold numbers of Nicaraguans to flee the country, the United States welcomed the Nicaraguan Government's decision to release 222 political prisoners, but reiterated the call for additional measures to restore civil liberties and democracy and condemned the recent moves to strip the released detainees and 94 other persons of their citizenship. His Government expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its work in supporting Costa Rica and other host countries in meeting the humanitarian protection needs of the refugees and encouraged the latter to consider applying to enter the United States by legal means, including through the new parole process for Nicaraguans.

118. The representative of **Guatemala** stressed that the challenging situation in the Americas, where the number of people in mixed migratory flows, according to the update on UNHCR operations, had almost doubled since 2021, called for sustained and comprehensive humanitarian responses at the local, national, regional and global levels; that, in turn, called for more coordinated cooperation and solidarity. Guatemala, as a refugee-hosting country, was grateful for the Office's increased presence and its efforts to respond to the needs of the refugees, asylum-seekers and others forming part of the mixed movements by providing international protection, humanitarian assistance and information.

119. Guatemala expressed appreciation to UNHCR for its active role in the MIRPS framework, which had optimized the participation of the international community and, in so doing, had helped it to shape its national action plans. MIRPS member States, in adopting the Tegucigalpa Declaration, had reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening local and national institutions and promoting dialogue and initiatives to enhance responsibility-sharing and regional solidarity. Guatemala and the other States endorsing the Los Angeles Declaration had reiterated their determination to strengthen regional and hemisphere-wide efforts to bolster international protection and cooperation and to create the conditions for safe, orderly, humane and regular migration; Guatemala would be hosting the next meeting of the special coordinators of the declaration the following week. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and the Russian Federation's unjustified aggression against Ukraine had increased the vulnerabilities and made international cooperation all the more important; no country could cope with the current dynamics of displacement and meet the protection needs of the displaced on its own.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.
