



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
15 November 2023

Original: English  
English, French and Spanish only

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

### Summary record of the 757th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 10 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Stasch (Vice-Chair)..... (Germany)

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General debate (*continued*)

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*In the absence of Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), Ms. Stasch (Germany), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

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

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Huseynov** (Azerbaijan) said that, for the past three decades, Azerbaijan had been hosting a large population of displaced persons. In 2020, after a 44-day war, Azerbaijan had restored its territorial integrity and created conditions conducive to the safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced Azerbaijani families. Life was returning to the liberated territories of Azerbaijan, which had been subjected to unprecedented vandalism during 30 years of military occupation by Armenia. Armenia had razed to the ground all residential areas in those territories and contaminated Azerbaijani land with mines and other unexploded ordnance. Those areas were now considered to be among the most mine-polluted on Earth; since November 2020, over 300 civilians, including internally displaced persons, had died or been seriously injured as a result of the landmines. Despite his Government's efforts to achieve peace, Armenia had maintained a heavy, illegal military presence within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan. In response to military provocations and in full compliance with international humanitarian law, Azerbaijan had launched local counter-terrorism measures. Every effort had been made to avoid collateral damage to civilians and civilian infrastructure.

2. Azerbaijan wished to reiterate that the rights and security of Armenian residents in Nagorno-Karabakh would be protected. It was determined to reintegrate Armenian residents as equal citizens. There had been not a single case of the forceful expulsion of Armenians from its territory. Likewise, there had been no damage to civilian infrastructure or incidents of violence against civilians, as had been confirmed by an independent United Nations mission to the Karabakh region and by a UNHCR representative. The statement made by the representative of Armenia at the Executive Committee's 756th meeting ([A/AC.96/SR.756](#)), questioning the credibility of United Nations personnel, was therefore totally unacceptable. The decision of Armenian residents in Karabakh – a region heavily influenced by a separatist puppet regime – to move to Armenia or elsewhere had nothing to do with Azerbaijan.

3. **Mr. Bicalho Cozendey** (Brazil) said that he wished to express solidarity with those affected by the deteriorating security situation in Israel and Palestine and by the earthquake in Afghanistan. Their plight would only add to the already appalling number of displaced people worldwide, making comprehensive responses to protect those most in need ever more urgent. It was a particularly challenging time: crises and armed conflicts proliferated, with grave humanitarian consequences, and a staggering number of persons had been forcibly displaced owing to persecution, conflict, violence and human rights violations. However, international solidarity had not increased at the same rate; instead, there were greater restrictions on the entry of migrants and asylum-seekers and attempts to relativize the core principles of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

4. Brazil firmly believed that the protection of refugees was a shared responsibility. In the spirit of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, it had extended the definition of refugee to provide for better protection of asylum-seekers and established an innovative system of prima facie recognition of refugees, which now included persons from countries that criminalized LGBTQIA+ minorities, and women and girls at risk of female genital mutilation.

5. In spite of numerous regional challenges, Latin America and the Caribbean countries had advanced on a path towards inclusion and solidarity. Their efforts must be met with a corresponding increase in UNHCR funding for the Americas. The international community's support was essential for countries with limited financial resources facing unprecedented movements of displaced persons. Brazil joined in the appeals for more flexible, unearmarked contributions. Should donor countries remain attached to their discretionary powers, mechanisms to channel a share of those contributions to those regions given less consideration could be considered as a measure of global solidarity. As 90 per cent of the world's refugees were hosted by low- and middle-income countries, greater responsibility- and burden-sharing must be the number one priority at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum.

6. **Mr. Atroshenko** (Russian Federation) said that Russia welcomed the Office's efforts to implement the Global Compact on Refugees and preparations for the forthcoming Global Forum on Refugees. His delegation called upon the Office to continue to act in accordance with the principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity. Loading the Office's agenda with issues unrelated to its mandate was counterproductive.

7. The Russian Federation considered that the rights of refugees included the right to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, which was often the best and most durable solution. It urged the Office's continued participation in a Russian initiative to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees and support their reintegration. His Government shared the Office's concerns over the complex migration situation in the European region, which was caused by the increase in refugees and migrants arriving from the Middle East and North Africa and the expulsion of persons seeking asylum in Europe. In that regard, initiatives to move asylum procedures beyond the borders of Europe were unhelpful. Of particular concern were the growing number of deaths of persons trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea and the failure to provide assistance to vessels carrying migrants and refugees. Increased efforts were needed to save those persons' lives and protect their rights during their journey to Europe. In addition, reducing the number of stateless persons, especially in Europe, should remain a priority of the Office.

8. In the Russian Federation, national legislation provided for the protection of foreign nationals and stateless persons, regardless of their country of origin, religion, ethnic background or race. More than 36,000 people from 69 countries had been granted asylum in Russia.

9. Russia was continuing to overhaul its migration laws on the basis of the principles of the protection of asylum-seekers and non-refoulement. Its asylum process had been optimized and proposals for extending temporary protection in response to the massive numbers of persons arriving in the country on an emergency basis had been put forward. The current rights and benefits of asylum-seekers and persons granted asylum had been preserved.

10. In 2022, there had been a massive influx of persons forcibly displaced from the Donetsk People's Republic, Lugansk People's Republic, Zaporozhye and Kherson Provinces and from Ukraine into the Russian regions. Russia had taken significant measures to provide those persons with protection and an adequate standard of living. UNHCR staff could be assured of the effectiveness of the Russian authorities' efforts to receive and accommodate the new arrivals by regularly visiting the temporary reception centres in Russia.

11. **Mr. Durrani** (Pakistan) said that he wished to convey his heartfelt condolences for the loss of precious lives and the destruction caused by the devastating earthquake in western Afghanistan. For over four decades, Pakistan had welcomed millions of Afghan nationals fleeing violence and conflict. Since August 2021, an additional 700,000 Afghan nationals had arrived, taking the total number of Afghan refugees and those with other statuses to over 3 million. However, intersecting crises, such as the aftershocks of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, new conflicts, a global recession and climate-induced disasters, had stretched his country's resources to the limit. In 2022, unprecedented flooding had submerged one third of the country, pushed an estimated 9 million people into poverty and caused over \$30 billion in damage. Such multifaceted challenges were emblematic of the problems faced – and the support needed – by developing countries hosting large refugee populations for protracted periods.

12. He wished to emphasize that his Government's plan to repatriate illegal foreigners was aimed at individuals residing illegally in Pakistan, such as those who had overstayed their visas or were undocumented. The toll of hosting refugees for so long and with considerably reduced international support, combined with security concerns and economic constraints, had forced Pakistan to strictly enforce its visa regime in accordance with international law. Those with registered status in Pakistan, such as Afghans with proof of registration cards or Afghan citizen cards, were not affected. Given the improved security situation in Afghanistan, conditions might be conducive to refugee returns. UNHCR was therefore encouraged to increase the repatriation grant of \$375 to ensure that returning refugees had sufficient financial assistance to resettle and rebuild their lives.

13. The second Global Refugee Forum was an opportunity to make progress towards burden- and responsibility-sharing. To address protracted refugee situations and achieve the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, the situation of host countries must remain high on the agenda. Providing loans to host countries only added to their debt burden. More must be done to foster refugee resettlement and third-country solutions. Pakistan called upon the international community to support refugee access to voluntary repatriation and reintegration through enhanced development, humanitarian and economic assistance for countries of origin.

14. **Mr. Bitok** (Kenya) said that, for over 30 years, Kenya had hosted more than 700,000 asylum-seekers and refugees, demonstrating its commitment to refugee protection, its international obligations and the common good. His Government's efforts to progressively implement the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees and the pledges made at the first Global Refugee Forum included ensuring that refugees had access to the education system and health care. In addition, Kenya was developing solutions to leverage the great potential and skills of refugees. Its Shirika Plan was intended to enhance access to basic human rights, such as health care, education and employment, in order to promote the socioeconomic inclusion, self-reliance and resilience of refugees and transform refugee camps into integrated settlements. In addition, measures had been taken to address statelessness, including by granting citizenship to the Pemba, Shona and Makonde communities.

15. Hosting refugees presented a number of challenges, including environmental degradation, inadequate funding and insecurity. While working to improve the lives of displaced persons, it was critical to ensure that no one was left behind, especially host communities. A comprehensive approach that addressed the root causes of displacement was also required. Efforts must be made to resolve conflicts and promote peace in regions affected by violence and unrest. Tackling the root causes could prevent future waves of displacement and reduce the burden on host countries.

16. Solutions to refugee situations would necessitate a multifaceted approach that included all levels of government, donors, the private sector, United Nations entities, refugees and host communities. International cooperation was crucial to ensuring effective refugee protection; no country could shoulder the responsibility alone. Nations must come together to share the burden and responsibility and collaborate on solutions, including by providing financial resources. The second Global Refugee Forum presented an opportunity to advance collaborative efforts towards responsibility-sharing, build synergies and harmonize responses so as to achieve durable solutions.

17. **Ms. Keyo** (Ethiopia) said that Ethiopia was home to over 1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. Her Government had made significant progress towards enhancing the self-reliance and socioeconomic inclusion of refugees. Among other measures, it had integrated refugee data into civil registration and education systems and development plans, implemented development-oriented projects in the agriculture and livestock sectors to have a direct, positive impact on refugees' lives and included refugees in a digital identity programme. Refugees and asylum-seekers had also been incorporated in a national strategy to combat violence against women and children.

18. Climate change was an issue of critical concern to Ethiopia, where access to clean energy in host communities remained very low. Refugees added to the strain on the local environment with their reliance on firewood for cooking and shelter. To mitigate the impact, climate action and resilience had been mainstreamed and prioritized. A focus had been placed on environmental conservation and rehabilitation, including by planting millions of tree seedlings to restore degraded lands in refugee camps and host communities.

19. UNHCR operations in Ethiopia faced continued and chronic underfunding, eroding hard-won gains. While Ethiopia was currently receiving and dealing with the emergency of refugees fleeing ongoing or recent conflicts in Somalia, the Sudan and South Sudan, support from donors was dwindling. The emergency response fund had largely been used to provide food to refugees. Timely financial assistance was critically needed to save their lives and provide them with the necessary protection and basic services. Ethiopia also had a significant amount of climate change-induced displacement. Her Government had taken various

measures to address the challenges of internal displacement and enable internally displaced persons to return home. Such measures, however, required enhanced development assistance and rehabilitation support.

20. As co-convener of the first Global Refugee Forum, Ethiopia was committed to making additional pledges at the second Forum, in particular in areas such as climate action and energy, refugee camp urbanization and combating gender-based violence. It looked forward to pledge matching and would be interested in engaging with partners in that regard. Now was the time to demonstrate real solidarity and stand with refugees and host countries.

21. **Mr. Ashkir** (Somalia) said that his Government was grateful to States in the region, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda and Yemen, for providing asylum to Somali refugees, and to donor countries, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNHCR for their invaluable assistance. Somalia had been grappling with significant challenges, including, armed conflicts, the fight against Al-Shabaab, droughts and floods, all of which had led to protracted, large-scale displacement. Millions of people were internally displaced; millions more were struggling to meet their food needs. At the same time, Somalia was hosting some 35,000 refugees and asylum-seekers.

22. For nearly three decades, efforts to address displacement had a humanitarian focus. While it had been a critical and life-saving approach, alone it was no longer sufficient or sustainable. Longer-term interventions that addressed humanitarian needs as well as development and peacebuilding challenges were needed to build resilience and peaceful communities. Development and durable solutions were urgently required.

23. His Government had made great strides towards establishing a legal framework for refugee management. It had adopted guidelines and policies on matters such as land distribution for eligible refugee returnees and internally displaced persons. Having ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, a bill on internally displaced persons was due to be considered, while another on refugees had recently been adopted. To find durable solutions, a holistic, area-based approach, focusing on internally displaced persons, refugees, returnees and host communities, was needed to promote social cohesion and minimize conflict over resources. Nevertheless, such an approach would require significant investment and capacity-building. Cooperation among humanitarian and development agencies, and support from the donor community, would be essential.

24. The persistent lack of adequate resources from the international community must be addressed; UNHCR needed the flexibility to be able to implement quick-impact projects to meet the immediate needs of returnees and prevent obstacles to voluntary repatriation. The challenges on the ground remained substantial, but there was a window of opportunity for all stakeholders to work together to enhance the capacity of receiving communities. While a collaborative effort of that nature required flexible mandates, UNHCR must maintain its repatriation and reintegration role.

25. **Mr. Mobini** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that he was profoundly concerned by the escalation in repression and the tragic loss of innocent lives, in particular of women, children and older persons, in the Gaza Strip. The devastating destruction of homes caused by the relentless bombardment would lead to years of displacement. Recent events were deeply connected to the decades of displacement that had been endured by people whose homes had been forcibly occupied by a certain regime.

26. As a result of various crises in the region, including military and irresponsible foreign interventions, the Islamic Republic of Iran had long hosted millions of refugees and displaced persons. Owing to a lack of international aid and massive refugee influxes, it had been forced to resettle them in cities rather than in camps. It was doing more than its fair share to protect refugees and was seeking fairer international responsibility-sharing. As part of the extensive services it provided, refugees and externally displaced persons had access to basic health and medical services, free of charge, education and other services, regardless of their residential status.

27. The inclusive humanitarian approach adopted by the Islamic Republic of Iran was reflected in the protection provided to women and girls, the country's support for the

participation of refugee athletes in local and international contests, the granting of citizenship to children of non-Iranian fathers, support for Afghan university students, and the provision of direct and indirect subsidies to all refugees and foreign nationals.

28. While the Islamic Republic of Iran appreciated the collaboration of donors and international organizations, especially UNHCR, it relied primarily on its own national resources to protect people on the move and had incurred huge economic, social, cultural and security costs from hosting refugees for several decades. In addition, the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America were actively undermining its hosting capacity. As Iranian infrastructure and its limited resources were not sufficient to accommodate the needs of both displaced persons and local communities, it was necessary to accord priority to domestic requirements. Many foreign residents therefore sought to migrate to European countries.

29. According to a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 69 per cent of the displaced population of Afghanistan had moved to the Islamic Republic of Iran as at December 2022, causing severe damage to health-care and educational facilities, employment, and energy and water supplies in local hosting communities. According to recent estimates, less than 1 per cent of the current costs of hosting refugees and displaced persons in Iran, namely about \$7 billion per year, were covered by international resources.

30. **Ms. Bejanishvili** (Georgia) said that Georgia appreciated the action taken by UNHCR to alleviate the plight of persons who were forcefully displaced from Ukraine in the wake of the ongoing war of aggression by Russia. Georgia was currently providing accommodation, education and health-care services for more than 27,000 war-affected Ukrainians.

31. The Law of Georgia on International Protection provided for procedural safeguards at all stages of the asylum procedure. The Georgia Refugee Forum hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNHCR in June 2023 had provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress of pledges made by Georgia during the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. In addition, the Government had hosted an event in 2022 aimed at sharing experience relating to the Asylum Capacity Support Group.

32. Almost 300,000 internally displaced persons, who had been expelled from the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali as a result of several waves of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Russian Federation since 1991, were currently registered in Georgia. The Government accorded top priority to their provision with decent living conditions until they were able to return to their homes. In the total absence of international monitoring mechanisms on the ground, the ongoing militarization by Russia of the occupied regions of Georgia continued to severely affect the everyday lives of people living there and posed an imminent threat of a new wave of forced displacement. As a result, the humanitarian and human rights situation in the regions continued to deteriorate. Her Government was thus deeply concerned about the recent statements by the Russian occupation regime regarding the deployment of a military naval base in the occupied Abkhazia region and its inclusion in the so-called integration initiative by Russia. Such action was yet another demonstration of the ongoing aggressive policy of Russia against Georgia, which blatantly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

33. She wished to recall the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, which had legally established the responsibility of Russia for human rights violations in the occupied regions of Georgia and concluded that Russia was obliged to enable the forcibly displaced population of those regions to return to their homes. Georgia therefore urged the Russian Federation to comply with the 2008 Ceasefire Agreement mediated by the European Union, to admit international security and human rights mechanisms, to cease its grave human rights violations, and to ensure the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes. The achievement of tangible results through the Geneva International Discussions, in which UNHCR played a major role, was of particular importance in that regard.

34. **Ms. Mendonça** (Angola) said that the right to international protection should be constantly reasserted since the dignity of internally displaced persons continued to be questioned. Millions were threatened with statelessness and the right of return to countries of origin was constantly postponed.

35. Angola was committed to seeking lasting solutions to the conflicts affecting the African continent, in particular the Great Lakes region, and underscored the importance of international cooperation as well as synergies between all stakeholders. The more effective integration of the development dimension into the provision of humanitarian assistance could greatly contribute to burden-sharing and alleviate the responsibilities of host countries. The conclusions of the meeting of the Economic and Social Council in June 2023 on the transition from relief to development had supported that view. The forthcoming Global Refugee Forum would uphold the same principle.

36. Despite the chronic shortfall in funding for UNHCR, Angola was pleased to note that the management was undertaking reforms, including risk management. It also supported the High Commissioner's latest appeal for voluntary contributions and announced that Angola would be making an unearmarked contribution for 2023 and 2024 within the next few days.

37. **Mr. Ndomahina** (Sierra Leone) said that Sierra Leone currently provided a safe haven for people seeking refuge in line with the Refugees Protection Act of 2007 and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

38. With the official close of UNHCR support to refugees in Sierra Leone, his Government, through its National Commission for Social Action had been requested by the multi-country office in Dakar to assume full ownership of the refugee programme and the asylum system, in accordance with the legislation of Sierra Leone. A road map for a phase-out strategy for the remaining caseload of 393 remaining refugees had been developed for nine host communities, but 385 refugees had not opted for either of the two feasible solutions of voluntary repatriation or local integration. As a result, a protected caseload of refugees without relevant legal documents lived in the country as citizens of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and were at risk of becoming stateless.

39. As part of the road map for a phase-out strategy, the Commission and UNHCR had undertaken a joint assessment mission in September 2021 and had identified numerous actions required to meet the needs of communities hosting refugees under the Tenki Salone project, which focused on strengthening local resilience and services.

40. Sierra Leone had adopted a National Action Plan on Statelessness on 16 December 2020. In 2019 the Government had empowered more than 15 heads of household and 400 locally integrated refugees by including them in national development programmes. The Social Safety Net Project had provided for free primary and secondary education, and free health care for children under the age of 5 years and for pregnant and lactating women.

41. However, as there was a lack of sufficient funding to implement the Tenki Salone project, Sierra Leone urged UNHCR to continue to advocate for funds from multilateral and bilateral development partners to ensure its full implementation and to ensure an adequate response to protracted refugee issues in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

42. **Mr. Logan** (Liberia) said that 1,780 persons of concern were resident in Liberia as of 31 August 2023. The Government, in close collaboration with Côte d'Ivoire and UNHCR, was taking action to confirm their legal status. Executive Order No. 108 provided for a multi-ministerial approach to the integration of Ivorian refugees through the issuance of civil documentation and their incorporation into the National Identification Registry. The procedures for the cessation of refugee status of 583 Ivorian refugees were nearing completion. The Asylum Committee, which was composed of highly skilled lawyers from relevant ministries, had played a pivotal role in expediting the procedures.

43. In addition, approximately 20,000 individuals from Burkina Faso resided in three south-eastern counties, and an estimated 12,000 persons were seeking asylum. They had fled from the turmoil in Burkina Faso and frequently lacked documentation, which rendered them vulnerable to exploitation, including the risk of human trafficking and various labour-related difficulties. The Government had formulated plans to provide protection through documentation and livelihood support with the assistance of humanitarian organizations.

44. The Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness served as a guiding framework for tackling statelessness. The Government of Liberia had fulfilled 90 per cent of its commitments under the Declaration.

45. The Government expressed its heartfelt gratitude to UNHCR for its generous financial support for the construction of the headquarters of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission in Monrovia. However, additional funding was required for the full realization of the project. UNHCR support was also required to bolster the economic prospects for the local integration process and the provision of aid to persons of concern.

46. **Mr. Halidou** (Niger) said that the Niger had experienced a mass influx in recent years of forcibly displaced persons seeking refuge. A country that hosted over 600,000 refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons was duty-bound to demonstrate its sense of responsibility and solidarity. The Niger had always maintained open borders and its people had consistently displayed hospitality, which was a cherished value in the country.

47. The Niger continued to receive refugees and asylum-seekers from Libya through the emergency transit mechanism established in cooperation with UNHCR in 2018, which had made it possible to save more than 4,000 lives.

48. The deplorable situation of the mass expulsions to Assamakka was a major concern for the authorities of the Niger and humanitarian organizations.

49. Security crises and natural disasters were the principal causes of forced displacement. In addition, people should be aware of the impact of the lengthy residence of refugees on their own living conditions, health and security and on those of their host communities. The Niger was endeavouring, with the assistance of its partners, to integrate refugees into the local social fabric by implementing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

50. As a co-convenor of the second Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, the Niger would spare no effort to ensure that it provided greater protection and assistance and more sustainable solutions for displaced persons. Nevertheless, it deeply regretted that humanitarianism, which was supposed to be based on the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence, was undermined by geopolitical and geostrategic tendencies.

51. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that Ethiopia had been quite a pioneer in terms of refugee inclusion and the search for solutions. He hoped that the country's residual challenges, including internal displacement and the receipt of new arrivals from Somalia and the Sudan, would be addressed and resolved.

52. The Shirika Plan in Kenya, which provided for the conversion of refugee camps into integrated settlements and for the empowerment of local communities, was a flagship initiative for the region and beyond. He also commended Kenya on its action to address statelessness.

53. South Sudan and Somalia continued to face fragile security and climate-related situations. He welcomed the emphasis placed on resilience and on breaking the cycle of drought, violence and displacement, and reassured the two countries of the continuous support of UNHCR.

54. Sierra Leone and Liberia had both referred to technical issues relating to residual refugee caseloads and improvements in their management. He appreciated the role that they had played in providing solutions for Ivorian refugees. The arrival of new refugees from Burkina Faso was partly related to the crisis in the central Sahel and required a great deal of vigilance. ECOWAS was an important partner that could help to bridge the gap between political action and the humanitarian response to refugee crises.

55. He commended the Niger on the role played in hosting refugees from neighbouring countries and addressing the challenge of internally displaced persons. The Government had also played an important role in the Great Lakes region and beyond.

56. Brazil would join other countries, including Chile and Colombia, in organizing a side event to mark the fortieth anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees prior to the Global Refugee Forum. Brazil had set an example in implementing the Declaration to the letter in its response to the arrival of refugees from the region and other parts of the world. He also fully supported the appeal by Brazil for unearmarked contributions.

57. Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran had been hosting Afghan refugees for almost 44 years. The Iranian authorities had allocated specific financial resources for the purpose,



and Pakistan had been faced with challenges such as the devastating floods. He appealed to both countries to continue protecting the people that they hosted and reassured them that UNHCR would continue to engage with the authorities in order to reconcile their security needs and challenges with the need for international protection.

58. UNHCR would continue to cooperate with the Russian Federation in the areas of support and legislative work. He agreed that voluntary repatriation continued to be the best solution for refugees worldwide and that the international community should assist host countries in creating conditions for people to return. He assured the Russian Federation that nothing in the agenda, work or documents of UNHCR went beyond its mandate.

59. UNHCR remained available to assist Azerbaijan, Armenia and other countries in finding solutions to the multiple displacements that had occurred since 1992. It was aware of the complexity of the situations, including the plight of some 100,000 refugees who had recently arrived in Armenia. Progress was necessary on the political front, but UNHCR was prepared to take action within the confines of its mandate.

60. He thanked Georgia for hosting 27,000 Ukrainian refugees and for convening the Refugee Forum in the country. UNHCR would continue to play its role in the Geneva International Discussions.

61. **Ms. Mbarushimana** (Observer for Burundi) said that among the nearly 90,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Burundi, approximately two-thirds were living in five camps, which had reached capacity. A new law on migration had recently been adopted and extended an appropriate level of protection to refugees and asylum-seekers. A national plan of action would soon be adopted to address the situation of some 1,200 people at risk of statelessness in Burundi.

62. The Government had set aside a site for a sixth camp and was awaiting funding from the Office to begin construction. Since 2017, the country had welcomed over 223,000 returnees, but the influx of voluntary returnees had recently slowed and the Government now planned to encourage people to return by engaging with countries of asylum and the Office, emphasizing the safety and dignity of returnees and respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

63. The authorities had launched a comprehensive national community development project in Burundi (Prodeci-Turikumwe) with a view to ensuring the harmonious integration and income-generating activities of returnees in local communities. They had also developed a support system for integrating returnees in the social protection system and in employment with the use of cash transfers, productive activities and human resource development measures.

64. **Mr. Maritz** (Namibia) said that there were over 7,000 asylum-seekers and refugees in Namibia, many of whom came from the Great Lakes region, in particular from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

65. His Government was extremely worried about funding shortfalls and reductions of the Office's operations, which affected the livelihood of asylum-seekers and refugees and put pressure on host countries.

66. Namibia had recently conducted a voluntary repatriation operation for the return of refugees and asylum-seekers to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It would continue pursuing voluntary repatriation efforts when countries of origin were at peace, as refugee status must be temporary. It was necessary to work for the eradication of man-made causes of human displacement and of the environment that bred such displacement.

67. The Government had committed to paying the salaries of teachers and nurses at the two schools and clinic at the Osire refugee settlement and, with the Namibia National Olympic Committee, it had organized a track event at the settlement with high-profile sprinters to motivate refugees to participate in sports.

68. The Government had also drafted and moved forward with four bills to end statelessness and to prepare for the ratification of the two main international instruments on statelessness.

69. His Government was concerned about the fact that the programme budget for 2024 had been amended by the secretariat after the 88th meeting of the Standing Committee. Established procedures should be followed for such documentation.

70. **Mr. Nxumalo** (Observer for Eswatini) said that, as host countries had recently had to face increasing budgetary constraints, the Office should help equip their Governments with the necessary resource mobilization skills. Members States in turn had a responsibility to include the people they cared for in resource mobilization initiatives and livelihood programmes so as to foster an environment where they could contribute to the development of their host countries and be more self-reliant and independent.

71. The Kingdom of Eswatini had made great strides in protecting and promoting the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. A new commissioner for refugees had recently been recruited after secondment to the Office, and training sessions had been conducted to update the country's asylum system. The Government fully intended to make use of the Asylum Capacity Support Group to improve the country's asylum system, and it was already implementing the pledges it had undertaken at various forums in recent years to reduce statelessness. It had recently completed a qualitative study of the causes and consequences of statelessness and had rolled out a documentation programme both for citizens and non-citizens residing in the country. The programme had met with some success, but it had entailed high costs both for the Government and for its partners. The Government had thus sought to engage the private sector in the activity. In addition, the parliament had recently passed a bill on civil registration that removed certain restrictions on registration.

72. In mid-2023, Eswatini had taken part in the Global Summit on Gender Equality in Nationality Laws and had reiterated its pledge to ensure gender equality in that field. The Government was also working to find sponsors and partners to provide resources for livelihood initiatives for refugees and asylum-seekers and had allocated over 1,000 ha of land to such initiatives.

73. **Mr. Küüt** (Estonia) said that much of the increase in the number of persons forcibly displaced was due to the war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine, in blatant violation of international law, which had forced nearly 12 million people to flee and become refugees or internally displaced persons and had so far left 40 per cent of the Ukrainian population in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The consequences of that aggression were being felt in Europe and beyond, resulting in a rise in food insecurity and food prices and an energy crisis affecting millions of vulnerable people around the world. Russia had weaponized food and hunger and was solely responsible for the global food security crisis. It was using the lives of the most vulnerable people in the world as a means to further its ambitions. It was still carrying out a deliberate policy of deporting Ukrainian children to Russia and Belarus, subjecting them to pro-Russian propaganda and forced adoption in Russian families, notwithstanding the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court for war crimes related to such actions. Only the United Nations, its agencies and its Member States could bring sufficient pressure to bear on Russia and Belarus.

74. Estonia had taken in many Ukrainian refugees and had done whatever possible to apply a whole-of-society approach to ensure an effective response. The Government appreciated the support it had received from the Office, including through the regional refugee response plan. It had sent some €25 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine and the Estonian private sector and civil society too had sent massive support.

75. **Mr. Grima** (Malta) said that the displacement of persons from Ukraine owing to the ongoing, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression waged by Russia and the situations in the Sudan and Syria were major concerns and had spill-over effects well beyond their immediate regions. For Malta, the primary concern was the central Mediterranean route, which remained a perilous migration path to Europe and increasingly posed challenges to receiving countries. Frontline countries, including Malta, required support and durable solutions safeguarding the dignity, safety and human rights of all. In that respect, the Office was an indispensable partner whose assistance was greatly appreciated.

76. Malta had given pledges at the first Global Refugee Forum and had implemented a number of those pledges, for example by acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, by taking part in refugee integration programmes and by

consolidating its asylum agency as a fully-fledged international protection agency. It would continue to support the Global Compact on Refugees by making new pledges at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum, for example relating to sustainable return and reintegration, improved dissemination of information and better services to assist persons with disabilities and members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Malta highly valued the non-discriminatory and human rights-based approach of the Office in its operations.

77. **Mr. Macieira** (Portugal) said that he wished to stress the importance of maintaining the Office's independence, which included the ability of its staff to present views to the member States freely and without constraint, including in relation to the promotion of diversity and the fight against discrimination on grounds of gender, age, race, ethnic origin, nationality, migration status, sexual orientation, identity and other protected categories.

78. All Member States must reaffirm their commitment to the reception, protection, assistance and integration of refugees and other displaced or stateless people. That should be particularly true in the current year, as the international community celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in many ways had opened the way to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by recognizing the right to seek and enjoy asylum.

79. Portugal had received some 60,000 people who had fled the war in Ukraine and had worked with local municipalities to provide nearly €50 million in assistance to ensure that they received housing, health care and social protection; some 12,000 people had been enrolled in language classes, and nearly 6,000 children in schools. Since 2015, his Government had worked with the Office for the resettlement of around 300 refugees from third countries per year, and since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, it had received some 1,200 Afghan citizens. Portugal was also active in the voluntary solidarity mechanism of the European Union, which carried out rescue and relocation operations in the Mediterranean, including in Lampedusa, Italy, and the Greek islands.

80. Portugal had embarked upon a reform of asylum policies involving the establishment of a new agency for integration, migration and asylum, the separation of border management from asylum procedures and the integration of asylum procedures with community integration. The Government had adopted legislation to improve the definition of statelessness and to better protect stateless people. It also took an active part in the Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways and was thus committed to ensuring that 15 per cent of refugees had access to higher education by 2030.

81. **Ms. Schroderus-Fox** (Finland) said that her delegation wished to express its deep condolences to the victims of the recent abhorrent attack against Israel. Finland unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms. It called for protection of civilians and a peaceful solution. Safety belonged to everyone. She also wished to express its solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

82. With resources plateauing and needs outstripping them, the Office was to be commended for seeking cost efficiencies and synergies with other agencies. Prioritization and humanitarian coordination were essential, and, in response to reports of different forms of abuse, including the diversion of aid, the Office's continued attention to oversight and risk management were very valuable in ensuring integrity and transparency, thus building trust and making flexible funding possible.

83. Age, gender and diversity sensitivity must be taken into account in humanitarian action. Finland applauded the Office's commitment to a rights-based approach and its sensitivity to intersecting vulnerabilities. Inclusivity in humanitarian action was a means to improve its effectiveness.

84. Noting that persons with disabilities were disproportionately affected by conflict and violence, she called on the Office to continue advancing disability inclusion by emphasizing accessibility to services and targeting activities. The Office, as the lead agency of the protection cluster and champion of the independent review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's protection policy, was in a unique position to take action. It should also maintain its leadership in providing LGBTIQ+ people with the protection and services that they needed.

85. Finland continued to stand up for the rights of persons in vulnerable situations, including in its resettlement programme, giving priority to children, women and persons with disabilities. It would implement an action plan to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in employment, including immigrant women.

86. **Ms. Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that she extended her delegation's most heartfelt condolences to the victims of the heinous terrorist attack in Israel and its solidarity and sympathy to the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

87. Providing sanctuary to those in need, regardless of their nationality, race, religion or sexual orientation, was the bedrock of the shared humanity of the international community, as well as a moral and legal responsibility.

88. As a result of the unjustified war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine, a displacement crisis had been triggered forcing millions of Ukrainians to flee their homes seeking safety, protection and assistance. By September 2023, Cyprus has received 20,000 Ukrainians seeking temporary protection, amounting to over 2 per cent of the island's population.

89. Her Government was following with concern the fragile humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and stood ready to immediately provide humanitarian assistance to the Armenians expelled from that territory.

90. For six consecutive years, Cyprus had consistently been the State member of the European Union with the highest per capita number of first-time applications for international protection. The number of such applicants corresponded to 6 per cent of the country's population. More than 89 per cent of the applicants for humanitarian protection were deliberately channelled through the buffer zone into the areas effectively controlled by the Government. That was an explicit case of making use of the most vulnerable of people for political ends. The surge in numbers had put an extraordinary strain on the country's capacity to provide adequate accommodation, services and support for those seeking protection. The Government had thus stepped up its response both in terms of policy and in relation to resources and capacities. The national refugee policy was now geared towards establishing a vice ministry for immigration and asylum, improving response capacity and strengthening human resources to optimize asylum application examination procedures and upgrading and creating new reception infrastructure. Significant efforts were also being invested in promoting refugees' and asylum seekers' integration into Cypriot society, for example by ensuring access to education, health care and employment opportunities, including through vocational training programmes.

91. **Mr. Endresen** (Norway) said that his Government strongly condemned the indiscriminate attacks carried out by Hamas against Israeli civilians. It also wished to express its concern for the welfare of Palestinian civilians. All parties must respect international humanitarian law, and civilians on all sides must be protected. He wished to extend his delegation's condolences to the victims of the recent earthquake in Afghanistan.

92. Norway was offering temporary collective protection and help with medical evacuations to fleeing Ukrainians in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The illegal war waged by Russia must be brought to an end.

93. Norway welcomed the high level of support received by UNHCR following the Russian invasion of Ukraine but was concerned that other emergencies were being overlooked and that the response to them was underfunded. Support to Ukraine must be maintained, but UNHCR must also advocate for similar levels of investment in other responses. Norway remained committed to providing unearmarked and flexible funding to facilitate the work of UNHCR. It strongly supported the Global Compact on Refugees, inclusive refugee policies and better international burden- and responsibility-sharing. It had launched an initiative to help displaced populations and host communities using both humanitarian and development funding.

94. At the Global Refugee Forum, Norway would emphasize the role of conflict as one of the main root causes of displacement and seek to prioritize issues critical for the protection of displaced children, including birth registration. The Office's overarching priority must remain protection, particularly of the most vulnerable groups, including the LGBTIQ+

community. Norway welcomed the importance being given by UNHCR to policies and plans relating to age, gender and diversity, as reflected in its proposed 2024 budget. UNHCR should step up its efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and provide support to survivors. The protection needs of boys and men must also be recognized.

95. Norway supported initiatives to expand refugees' access to jobs and promote their social and economic inclusion. Such initiatives should be developed with the involvement of refugees. A framework was needed for the return of persons found not to be in need international protection. Norway strongly supported UNHCR and urged Member States to contribute towards reducing the funding shortfall.

96. **Mr. Villegas** (Argentina) said that the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region had a long history of welcoming displaced persons. However, because of the numbers of people now requiring protection and assistance and the scale of the challenges the countries now faced, greater international support was needed. Argentina joined the call for contributions to reduce the funding shortfall.

97. In the 40 years that had passed since the country's return to democracy in 1983, which had followed a brutal dictatorship during which thousands of people had had to flee abroad, Argentina had become a host country offering a high level of protection. It recognized claims of persecution based on sexual orientation and gender-based violence and had a generous legal framework for refugee status determination. It had established a public-private partnership to promote the economic, social and cultural rights of the 230,000 forcibly displaced and stateless persons whom, according to UNHCR data, Argentina hosted as at June 2023; it had also launched a community sponsorship network that now brought together more than 59 host communities, bolstered implementation of the country's law on the recognition and protection of stateless persons, and begun work on a special framework for providing support to victims of gender-based violence or violence based on sexual orientation.

98. **Mr. Espinosa Cañizares** (Ecuador) said that he wished to express his condolences to the victims of the tragic events in the conflict involving Israel. The international community must step up its efforts to ensure the safety and dignity of persons of concern to UNHCR and safeguard their human rights. Mechanisms for increased burden- and responsibility-sharing were needed. Sufficient, predictable support would allow host countries to provide timely, effective assistance. Ecuador joined the call for the international community to address the funding shortfall through unearmarked contributions.

99. The country's experience in assisting and protecting persons in situations of mobility was widely recognized. In May, Ecuador had begun the third and last stage of a process to regularize the status of Venezuelan refugees and refugees of other nationalities, demonstrating the country's commitment to their full integration. At the Global Refugee Forum, Ecuador would seek to find inclusive solutions that prioritized support for persons of concern while also taking account of the needs of host communities. Initiatives to increase compliance with the Global Compact on Refugees, increase funding for UNHCR and create partnerships among States, civil society and the private sector should be promoted.

100. **Mr. Matulay** (Slovakia) said that Slovakia supported the remarks in the High Commissioner's opening statement regarding the relationship between conflict and displacement and the need to act in greater solidarity with refugees and host communities, address the climate emergency, promote good governance, invest in development and protect human rights. Given the record rates of forced displacement, UNHCR was needed more than ever.

101. Persons forced to flee Ukraine because of the Russian aggression continued to seek safety in Slovakia, and Slovakia remained committed to supporting them. Since the onset of the Russian war in Ukraine, more than 1.7 million Ukrainians had arrived in Slovakia and some 130,000 had applied for temporary protection. He welcomed the support that UNHCR provided as a complement to the Government-led efforts to assist Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and the Office's planned winterization response in Ukraine in the coming months.

102. Sustainable development provided the best means for preventing crises, including displacement. Progress must be made soon in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

The international community must provide greater support for national-level political solutions for the safe and dignified return of refugees. All countries must play their part in improving the lives of forcibly displaced persons, and the Global Refugee Forum provided an opportunity for them to do so. At the Forum, Slovakia would seek to generate fresh support for the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.

103. **Mr. Ghikas** (Greece) said that he wished to express his deepest condolences to all those who had lost loved ones during the appalling escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza. Greece stood with Israel and its people and categorically condemned the atrocious terrorist attack that had indiscriminately targeted civilians. His Government also extended its condolences and solidarity to the victims of the recent earthquake in Afghanistan. The wider surge in violence globally, which included the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, the humanitarian tragedy in Nagorno-Karabakh and the civil war in the Sudan, demanded the full attention of the international community.

104. UNHCR was gradually transferring ownership of its large-scale programmes in Greece to the Government. Under a programme supported by UNHCR, Greece had transferred over 5,000 applicants for and beneficiaries of international protection, including some 1,300 unaccompanied minors, to other European Union member States. In July, Greece had allocated €200,000 in additional funding to the Sports for Peace project to provide services to children with disabilities. Greece had provided humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians both in and outside their country, and it wished to reiterate the need to fully ensure the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. Approximately 26,000 people had thus far been granted temporary protection under a speedy, simplified procedure. Their temporary residence permit allowed them to work and obtain various services. Greece had activated a national mechanism to identify unaccompanied minors and place them in special emergency accommodations. Smuggling networks must be dismantled, and legal pathways must be fostered. Greece supported a whole-of-society approach.

105. **Mr. Gallón** (Colombia) said that he wished to reiterate his Government's call for a resumption of the dialogue between Israel and the State of Palestine. His Government wished to express its solidarity with the victims and their families and called for the cessation of violence and provocations. It also wished to express its sorrow at the loss of life resulting from the earthquakes in Afghanistan.

106. Colombia wished to thank UNHCR for supporting its efforts to assist the almost 3 million migrants present in the country – the status of almost 2 million of whom had been regularized – and for helping it to strengthen its refugee system. It hoped that the support would continue and be aligned with the priorities of the Government, which was facing increasing challenges given the growing number of asylum-seekers. Meeting the needs of that group would require coordination between host countries and multilateral agencies. The role of international cooperation would also be key.

107. Colombia hoped to share good practices and the lessons learned through its efforts to meet the needs of displaced populations at the Global Refugee Forum, of which it was a co-convenor. It also hoped to build a new consensus around the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees at the event that it was organizing with Brazil and Chile to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration's adoption. Total peace was a priority for Colombia, and in preparation for the Forum, it was helping to develop a multi-stakeholder pledge on peacebuilding.

108. Colombia was working with other States in the region to dismantle migrant smuggling networks and headed a working group on migration movements that sought to bolster humanitarian assistance and improve mechanisms for identifying the profiles of people in transit.

109. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the path that Argentina had taken in transitioning from a refugee-producing country to a host country served as an inspiring model. He wished to recognize the significant operational and legislative framework on human mobility in place in Ecuador and the increasing focus under that framework on the regularization of refugees' status, which was essential for their inclusion. Colombia had a highly developed legal framework relating to temporary

protection, which, in turn, supported inclusion. The process of working towards total peace in Colombia would help reduce internal displacement in that country.

110. Malta was exposed to complex flows because of its location in the middle of the Mediterranean, and its situation raised important issues, including the need to improve burden-sharing within Europe. He welcomed the country's membership in the Security Council, where it could remind that body that the failure to achieve peace and security would lead to further humanitarian tragedies. Cyprus faced challenges that were similar to those of Malta and was under significant pressure. UNHCR stood ready to support Cyprus in implementing accelerated, simplified procedures to identify people needing international protection when they arrived at its borders. He welcomed the efforts made by Greece to take ownership of programmes previously run by UNHCR, which had relieved some of the pressure on UNHCR and allowed it to concentrate on other crises. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, noted in the statement by Portugal, was significant for UNHCR because of the need to protect the human rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

111. Norway had always been one of the strongest supporters of UNHCR. He wished to thank Norway for noting the importance of unearmarked contributions, particularly where the response to an emergency was underfunded. Although persons found not to need international protection fell outside the scope of the Office's mandate, it was important for there to be a return procedure in place that was respectful of their rights and dignity. Finland had always been a generous donor and consistently championed the rights of persons with disabilities. He wished to thank Estonia for the reminder that UNHCR must stay steadfast in its response in Ukraine and Slovakia for stating that UNHCR continued to be needed and for mentioning the role of the Sustainable Development Goals. If progress could be made towards achieving the Goals, there would be fewer refugees in the world, since, in addition to development, the Goals dealt with human rights, climate action and many other causes of refugee movements.

112. As a refugee-hosting country, Burundi was in need of greater support from the international community. Efforts would be continued to increase the number of refugees returning to Burundi from neighbouring countries and to support their integration in Burundi. He wished to thank both Namibia and Eswatini for taking steps to strengthen their asylum systems and improve their statelessness legislation. The role of sports, which Namibia had referred to when reporting on the donation made by its Olympic Committee to refugees in the country, was crucial in relieving the plight of refugees.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*