



# General Assembly

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

### Summary record of the 758th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 10 October 2023, at 3 p.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 3.10 p.m.*

**General debate** (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Bachtobji** (Tunisia) said that the figures presented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the number of refugees around the world revealed the extent of the challenge faced by the international community. States must foster solidarity and burden-sharing to reduce the suffering of refugees and provide durable and effective solutions. They must also work to build capacity in countries of transit and host countries, most of which were developing countries. His delegation called on the international community to work towards the return of refugees to their home country, when circumstances permitted, or their resettlement in a third country with the capacity to accommodate them. The principle of shared responsibility was central in that regard. Tunisia reaffirmed its commitment to protecting refugees and ensuring respect for their human dignity. Peaceful solutions to conflict needed to be found to address the root causes of displacement. However, Tunisia categorically rejected the unlawful settlement of migrants under false pretences and condemned the use of suffering of victims by the media and political circles for their own ends. He called on the Office to carry out full investigations into cases under its jurisdiction, particularly with respect to refugee status determination procedures for irregular migrants, and to work with the countries concerned when assessing humanitarian situations. The work that had begun at the International Conference on Migration and Development in Rome in 2023 must continue.

2. Tunisia, as part of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, had put forward successful initiatives for the maintenance of international peace and security during its membership of the Security Council in 2020 and 2021. In particular, it had introduced Security Council resolution 2532 (2020), which had called for a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda, against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Tunisia would be launching a new initiative on conflict prevention in Africa as a part of its mandate as a member of the African Union Peace and Security Council.

3. **Ms. Boumaiza-Mebarki** (Algeria) said that the number of refugees in need of support was growing owing to continued colonization and a lack of resources to address emerging flashpoints, making the work of the Office more difficult. Conflicts persisted in the absence of durable solutions for refugees, who were losing hope of returning home. The international community must combat attempts to spread misinformation and politicize the situation of refugees.

4. Algeria dedicated significant resources to assisting refugees, displaced persons and migrants on its territory and worked for peace in the Sahel-Saharan region. To that end, Algeria continued to chair the Agreement Monitoring Committee of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Her Government offered substantial support, considering its national capacity, to the refugees from Western Sahara who had been living in Algeria for decades. However, that support did not cover all their needs. She urged UNHCR to adapt the number of refugees upon which the aid provided was calculated to reflect the reality on the ground. The number of refugees used for that calculation was 90,000, but according to the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR there were 173,000 refugees from Western Sahara in Algeria. She hoped that refugees from Western Sahara, who had not been invited to the first Global Refugee Forum, would be invited to the forthcoming event and that the international community would work to enable them to exercise their right to voluntary repatriation, for which a referendum on self-determination was necessary.

5. **Mr. Ahmad** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that Syria condemned the continuing heinous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation force against the Palestinian people, including the deliberate targeting of refugee camps. The Syrian Arab Republic stood by the Palestinian people in their defence of their land and rights, after the international community had failed them for many decades.

6. The return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons to their home country was a priority for his Government, which was working to overcome any obstacles to their return and restore stability and security. To that end, further support from the international community was required. The Syrian Arab Republic would continue its cooperation with UNHCR, including through the strengthening of the channel of communication and consultation with the Office on matters related to the return of refugees. That channel could be used to examine cases regarding voluntary, dignified and safe return and cases of discrimination against returnees or persons who had fled from their previous place of normal residence, sought asylum abroad or had resided in areas under the control of a non-State group. Cooperation with UNHCR would also continue to ensure better access for humanitarian efforts, guarantee a predictable UNHCR presence in the country, enable refugees and internally displaced persons to make free and informed decisions about their return, ensure non-discrimination for returnees, improve access to documents for refugees abroad and simplify procedures related to housing and property. Cooperation with all stakeholders would continue to ensure the voluntary return of all internally displaced persons.

7. **Mr. Guillermet Fernández** (Costa Rica) said that he felt bound to repeat the concerns he had expressed the previous year regarding war, political instability, democracy, systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the devastating consequences of climate change. Over the preceding year, Costa Rica had faced challenges related to large mixed movements of persons transiting through the country and high numbers of asylum-seekers. According to UNHCR, Costa Rica received the third highest number of asylum requests in the world. Cooperation with the Office had been vital to face the resulting pressure on national institutions and resources. The presence of United Nations agencies in Costa Rica was fundamental to the proper management of the mixed movements of persons and for the fulfilment of obligations under international instruments on migration and refugees.

8. The international community needed to work together and find new solutions to address conflict and climate change. Joint efforts were needed to improve reception and processing capacity and combat the causes of migration. Those efforts must involve improving living conditions and respect for human rights and fighting climate change. It was particularly important to strengthen capacities for voluntary and safe return. He wished to thank the Office for its commitment to the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons, regardless of their age, gender, background, including members of the LGBTIQ+ community. Work must continue to provide inclusive services, protect human rights and identify safe solutions.

9. **Ms. Méndez Escobar** (Mexico) said that her delegation expressed its deep concern regarding the humanitarian situation in Israel and Palestine and called on all parties to the conflict to conduct themselves in accordance with international law and guarantee the protection of civilians at all times. Her delegation also expressed solidarity with those affected by the earthquake in Afghanistan.

10. A coordinated international response to the unprecedented movements of people was needed. Fortunately, the international community had concluded agreements over the preceding decade to face the challenges of the twenty-first century together. The Global Compact on Refugees was more relevant than ever and the second Global Refugee Forum would strengthen political will in that regard.

11. Mexico was facing a highly complex human mobility situation and received a rapidly growing number of requests for asylum; 150,000 such requests were expected by the end of 2023. The asylum-seekers had often made dangerous journeys to flee terrible situations. They needed care tailored to their needs, which Mexico was making significant efforts to provide, with UNHCR support. Measures were implemented to ensure respect for human rights and integration into Mexican society.

12. Mexico had joined efforts to ensure a coherent regional response to human mobility, including with regard to the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees. The Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) was the key mechanism for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees in Mesoamerica and much progress had been made.

13. The international community must address the sources of conflict and promote inclusive and sustainable development and devote greater efforts to tackling the root causes that led persons to seek international protection.

14. **Mr. Limane Mahamat** (Chad) said that Chad fulfilled the obligations under the international legal instruments it had ratified and had adopted legislation on asylum and internal displacement in recent years. There were over 1 million displaced persons in Chad, representing 3 per cent of the population. In 2023, there had been a new inflow of refugees and returnees from the Sudan, mostly women and children, adding to the 600,000 refugees from Darfur who had been living in Chad for 20 years with no real hope of return. Chad was determined to continue fulfilling its humanitarian assistance obligations even though assisting hundreds of thousands of refugees represented a huge challenge on many fronts and had a negative impact on local populations. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations had mobilized \$225 million to ensure a comprehensive response to that situation. However, those funds were not sufficient to fully address the situation. Chad was therefore calling for greater international solidarity and a high-level round table on the humanitarian crisis it was facing with a view to the mobilization of sufficient resources to meet the needs of host communities and refugees affected by the crisis in the Sudan. It was hoped that a solution could be found to the Sudanese conflict that would enable the voluntary return of the refugees from that country.

15. **Mr. Begeç** (Türkiye) said that his delegation had observed a minute of silence for the loss of civilian lives in Afghanistan, Australia and Palestine. With regard to the latter issue, Türkiye called for restraint, the renunciation of the use of force, the protection of civilians and a lasting two-State solution.

16. He agreed with the High Commissioner that there was an urgent need for a better response to unprecedented displacement. The core principles of the refugee regime were being challenged by externalization of asylum processes, pushbacks and the outsourcing of obligations. The situation was aggravated by rising religious hatred and racism and decreased funding. In 2022, some 2,400 migrants had gone missing in the Mediterranean Sea, resulting in more civilian deaths than the situations in Syria, Yemen and the Sudan.

17. In the current context, zero-refugee or zero-migration policies were futile and counterproductive. Robust preventive measures were needed to boost the resilience of host countries, consolidate the refugee system and safeguard the mandate of UNHCR. Host countries were shouldering an almost unmanageable burden; the priority for the international community should be to ensure returns.

18. Türkiye had been the country hosting the most refugees for the past decade. While many best practices had been implemented in favour of those refugees, it was not in their best interests for the current situation to continue. Greater responsibility-sharing was needed. The Global Refugee Forum was important in that respect and Türkiye looked forward to contributing to its successful outcome as one of the co-convenors.

19. **Mr. Adjoumani** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that Côte d'Ivoire offered its condolences to those affected by the recent earthquakes and floods. His delegation welcomed the efforts made by UNHCR to improve responses to mixed movements of people and to contribute to the implementation of international instruments on refugees and migration. He strongly encouraged all stakeholders to ensure the success of the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, thus creating opportunities for development inclusion, education and training and technical assistance in Africa. The Office, governments and other partners were urged to work together to better guarantee the rights of displaced and stateless persons.

20. The growing numbers of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons constituted a worrying humanitarian situation that had significantly reduced the resources of UNHCR and host countries. The international community must make every effort towards solidarity, inclusion and equity.

21. Côte d'Ivoire continued to host thousands of refugees, around 30,000 of whom were from countries in the region experiencing terrorist insurgencies. In response, his Government had recently approved the construction of more than 2,000 shelters at a cost of \$8 million.

Parliament had adopted legislation that ensured better protection for refugees in the country. He called for greater international support for UNHCR initiatives.

22. **Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve** (Belgium) said that he would like to express his delegation's sympathy for the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan and the victims of the terrorist attacks in Israel.

23. It was important to support persons who were displaced and in need of humanitarian aid and Belgium reiterated its commitment to that cause. The international community would have the opportunity to reaffirm its shared responsibility towards all refugees at the Global Refugee Forum.

24. Belgium was planning to include refugees at all stages of its development cooperation programmes. Sustainable solutions were needed in a context of protracted crises. Development cooperation must support the social and economic inclusion of refugees in order to enable them to make a positive contribution to their host community and gain greater autonomy.

25. Belgium contributed €10 million a year to UNHCR in core funding and €8 million for underfunded and forgotten crises. Core funding was important because it enabled the Office to respond rapidly to sudden crises and allocate funds to less visible and forgotten crises. In 2023, Belgium was providing €3 million of additional funding to address the crisis in Ukraine.

26. The changes made by the High Commissioner to the budget presentation to make it more accessible were welcome. The budget needed to respond to the reality on the ground and indicators were needed in that regard. His delegation supported an increased budget for child protection. During its presidency of the European Union in 2024, Belgium would work to close the funding gap and ensure funding for all crises.

27. His delegation thanked UNHCR for its work and called on it to continue its efforts to protect refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons of all ages, sexes and backgrounds, including those who were members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

28. **Mr. Bonnafont** (France) said that France condemned in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks against Israel and its population and expressed its full solidarity with Israel and the victims of those attacks. It called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

29. UNHCR was working under extremely difficult conditions, including natural disasters in several countries, the unjustified aggression of Russia against Ukraine, the violence of armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the forced exodus of 100,000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, which had certain similarities to ethnic cleansing and was a direct consequence of military operations carried out by Azerbaijan and the months of illegal blocking of the Lachin corridor.

30. In that context, responsibility-sharing between departure, transit and host countries was needed. In 2022, France had contributed by welcoming 547,000 refugees, with the support of civil society, and offering them personalized housing and employment assistance. France was continuing to increase its financial contributions to UNHCR and had already paid €94 million in 2023. It was regrettable that the available funding was not sufficient. He therefore welcomed efforts to diversify funding sources, both through dialogue with Member States and the private sector.

31. France called for full respect for international humanitarian law and paid tribute to the 116 humanitarian workers who had been killed in 2022. Representatives of his Government had organized a side event to the General Assembly on the safety of humanitarian personnel.

32. France reaffirmed the principle of the universality of rights. UNHCR was mandated to protect individuals without discrimination. It paid particular attention to the rights of refugee women and girls, who were often at an increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence, as had been borne out by far too many accounts from survivors of the crisis in the Sudan. The work of UNHCR to report on the persecution suffered by those forced to flee because of their gender identity or sexual orientation was welcome.

33. At the Global Refugee Forum, of which France was a co-convenor, France would present an initiative on the protection and integration of women refugees.

34. **Mr. Grassi** (Italy) said that his delegation expressed its condolences for the victims of the attack by Hamas in Israel and the earthquake in Afghanistan.

35. The international community was facing ever more exceptional challenges exacerbated by protracted displacement in complex crises. Italy had never wavered in its commitment to those in need and had contributed \$33.1 million to UNHCR humanitarian activities. Private donations from Italy amounted to \$24.1 million.

36. Special mention should be made of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The relevant actors must work in a more coherent and coordinated manner to bring about sustainable peace, development and the fulfilment of humanitarian needs. Climate change was further exacerbating humanitarian crises and a new approach was urgently needed to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. UNHCR staff were to be commended for their work in highly insecure settings. Italy supported the independence of the Office, which was reflected in its age, gender and diversity policy.

37. Italy would continue to support the Global Compact on Refugees and work towards strengthening solidarity with refugees and affected communities. It remained committed to the reception and protection of refugees fleeing violence and persecution.

38. **Mr. Bekkers** (Netherlands) said that his delegation was shocked by the terrible terrorist attack on Israel and concerned about the escalation of violence following the attack. The Netherlands condemned the terrorist actions by Hamas in the strongest possible terms. His delegation's thoughts and prayers were with the innocent victims on both the Israeli and Palestinian side. They also went out to the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

39. With 90 per cent of all displaced persons hosted by low- and middle-income countries, the international community needed to provide support and help to find long-lasting solutions. The Netherlands was working to that end. The €500 million budget for its international partnership programme for the protection of refugees in countries in their region of origin, Prosects, would see a double-digit increase in the coming years. The Netherlands was engaged in the Global Compact on Refugees multistakeholder pledge on leveraging the humanitarian-development-peace nexus through comprehensive approaches to promote resilience, self-reliance, and durable solutions for refugees and host countries. It was also working under a mental health and psychosocial support pledge to integrate mental health and psychosocial support into refugee responses and increase capacity in the field. The Netherlands was a Vice-Chair of the Support Platform of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries.

40. The Netherlands contributed large amounts of unearmarked funds and hoped to see more unearmarked funds from other donors for humanitarian efforts. The international community must show solidarity and unity in the service of refugees generally and at the Global Refugee Forum in particular.

41. **Mr. Markotić** (Croatia) said that his delegation expressed its deep condolences to Israel, the Israeli people and the families concerned. It strongly condemned the acts of terror and violence and the heinous attacks against Israel.

42. It was essential to maintain a robust humanitarian response to all crises around the globe with the same level of solidarity and compassion for all refugees and displaced persons. Croatia supported the independence of the High Commissioner. With a view to long-term solutions to humanitarian crises, Croatia would contribute up to €600,000 for development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects in the Horn of Africa between 2023 and 2025. It had also contributed to health, education and training programmes for Syrian refugees.

43. Croatia strongly condemned the unjustified Russian aggression against Ukraine. It was hosting more than 24,000 Ukrainian refugees and had provided some €52 million in urgent humanitarian aid. Croatia would host an international conference for donors on humanitarian demining in Ukraine. Demining was a prerequisite for the safe and voluntary return of refugees.

44. **Mr. Hasans** (Latvia) said that his delegation shared the High Commissioner's concerns regarding the growing number of people who had been forcibly displaced, with more than 5 million people driven from their homes due to continued deadly conflict in the Sudan, over 100,000 refugees arriving in Armenia in just a week after the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and more than 6 million Ukrainians forcibly displaced by the war of Russia against Ukraine. Refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons lost not only their homes but also their livelihoods, with their entire lives packed into just a few travel bags.

45. Illegal migration was a serious problem for Latvia, with hundreds trying to cross its borders with Belarus each week. People smugglers were profiting from the situation. Artificial migration routes through Belarus were being used in an attempt to destabilize societies in the Baltic region and throughout Europe.

46. The war waged by Russia against Ukraine had serious humanitarian consequences. Over 50,000 Ukrainians had been officially registered in Latvia, which would continue to support the Ukrainian people for as long as necessary. His delegation welcomed the extension by the European Union of temporary protection to Ukrainians fleeing the Russian war against Ukraine. For the sake of the people of Ukraine and the international community, the senseless and unjustified war of Russia must stop.

47. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, in the current context of multiple crises, he wished to recall the successful return of Ivorian refugees that had taken place the previous year. That was an example of how positive efforts could lead to the resolution of crises. In Chad, 1 in every 17 people was a refugee. It was important to provide Chad with humanitarian and development aid to support stability in the region.

48. He thanked Algeria for its support for refugees from Western Sahara. Refugees of all nationalities were welcome to participate in the Global Refugee Forum. The role of Tunisia as a transit country had recently become more significant and UNHCR would continue to offer support to the Government with a view to supporting its commitment to international protection and ensuring that persons who were in need of such protection were not excluded. The commitment of the Syrian Arab Republic to the return of refugees was very significant and needed to be communicated and explained to the refugees in question. Such communication was needed in order to build trust in the repatriation process.

49. UNHCR would continue to work with Costa Rica, but the country needed more international support. UNHCR would also continue to work with Mexico, which was an example of good practice in terms of integration.

50. Thanks were due to Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands for their support and financial contributions to UNHCR. He appreciated the complexity of the challenges facing Latvia, for which it could count on the support of the Office and International Organization for Migration (IOM). He was grateful to Latvia and Croatia for the support they were offering to Ukrainian refugees. Demining was indeed an important aspect of humanitarian work.

51. The cooperation between UNHCR and Türkiye, a country that hosted 4 million refugees, had led to a mutual understanding that he greatly appreciated.

52. **Mr. Majawar** (Yemen) said that the world was experiencing a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented magnitude. He wished to extend his condolences to the victims of the earthquakes in Afghanistan and Morocco and the floods in Libya. Yemen was continuing to endure indescribable suffering because of the Houthi rebels' pillaging and arrogant violations of human rights. Over 86 per cent of the Yemeni population was in serious need of humanitarian assistance owing to shortages of food, medicine and drinking water. Over 5 million Yemenis had been internally displaced. A further 2 million who had fled the country had not been awarded refugee status in the host countries. His Government was doing its best to cooperate with the international community and Governments in the region to remedy that situation. However, the challenges of internal displacement were overwhelming. It was therefore necessary to seek sustainable solutions. Some results had been achieved, but more resources were required to contend with the full scale of displacement. Since 2015, 3 million people had returned to the country. Another 2 million, who were living in regions devastated by the Houthi militia, had received no assistance and were in urgent need of primary services.

However, the Government required support in order to supply them. Migration from the Horn of Africa placed an enormous additional burden on the authorities of his country. At the same time, the Houthi militia were preventing the movement of humanitarian assistance and were plundering aid consignments. Refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia were being used as cannon fodder on the front line in battles. He called on the international community to provide more assistance at every level to enable the Government of Yemen to implement the law on migration and to stem the burgeoning flows of migrants. He particularly thanked Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates for their help in that respect.

53. Despite the exceptionally difficult circumstances prevailing in his country, his Government was committed to compliance with the international instruments on refugees to which it was a party. It had granted refugee status to all applicants from Somalia, the Horn of Africa and a number of Arab countries. It had offered them protection and primary services on the basis of burden- and responsibility-sharing.

54. He wished to draw attention to the plight of Yemeni refugees in other countries. His Government therefore asked the High Commissioner to apply the principle of equal treatment. His Government greatly appreciated the support that it had received during the high-level pledging event for the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. It was especially important that all financial pledges should be fulfilled.

55. **Mr. Moerzinger Pagani** (Uruguay) said that it was once again necessary to advocate the promotion and protection of the rights of thousands of people who were facing the challenges of displacement and mixed movement in search of better living conditions. People were on the move for a variety of increasingly pressing reasons, including violence, conflict, persecution, climate change and the lack of economic opportunities. The situation in the Americas was worrying, in that the number of people requiring protection and assistance had risen by 25 per cent in 2023. In his own country, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers had shot up in recent years. Between 2017 and 2023 a total number of 51, 500 stateless persons and persons who had been forced to flee had been received in Uruguay. That situation obliged the Refugee Commission of Uruguay to work closely with UNHCR to improve access to the territory for the numerous asylum-seekers and to secure better living conditions and access to essential services for returnees. Since 2015, all asylum-seekers in Uruguay had been issued with an identity document identical to that of other residents, a procedure that helped them to integrate. They could be interviewed remotely to facilitate the provision of protection. Regional initiatives such as the Brazil Plan of Action, the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework and the Quito Process had shown that it was possible to meet the challenges of displacement in a coordinated fashion and on the basis of cooperation. Displacement was often triggered by violations of the human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For that reason, all international human rights actors should join forces in order to halt discrimination and exclusion, to reduce inequality and vulnerability and to address the causes of displacement.

56. **Mr. Obeidat** (Jordan) said that war and conflict were among the reasons why the world was witnessing the largest number of forcibly displaced persons since the Second World War. Mere numbers did not reflect the tragedy that lay behind them. The escalation of the conflict in Gaza and the surrounding area threatened to create an explosive situation throughout the region. His Government endorsed the Secretary-General's statement on the need to provide emergency relief to the Palestinians who were under a blockade in Gaza. The Government of Jordan would work with its partners and the United Nations to provide all the requisite assistance.

57. Jordan was hosting more than 1.3 million Syrian refugees, 10 per cent of whom lived in camps. Despite the additional economic pressures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and the effects of climate change, Jordan was still providing those refugees with basic services. More than 150,000 Syrian children were enrolled in the public education system, 340,000 Syrians were covered by the Jordanian health-care system and 370,00 work permits had been issued to Syrian refugees, despite the existence of unemployment in Jordan.

58. International support had been dwindling. International funds in response to the Syrian crisis were no more than 10 per cent of what had been expected. That had placed many refugees in a difficult situation. While his Government's response plan for the Syrian crisis



was still being implemented, notwithstanding the dramatic drop in contributions to it, the ability of the Government to deliver the necessary services had reached a limit. It did not have the resources to look after more refugees. That was why the responsibility of caring for refugees should be shared by everyone and not just left with Jordan. There was no doubt that Syrians' future lay in their own home country. However, in order to create suitable conditions for their return, funding would be required along with a political solution to the Syrian crisis in line with the road map set out in Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). Jordan would actively participate in the upcoming Global Refugee Forum and work to ensure its success.

59. **Mr. Baddoura** (Lebanon) said that the current alarming volume of forcible displacement was largely the result of a general failure to tackle the pressing challenges of collective security and climate change. The dreadful escalation of the conflict in the Middle East could be mainly ascribed to the international community's reticence to end impunity for the Israeli occupation of Palestine and to restore the legitimate rights of the oppressed Palestinian people.

60. About 40 per cent of the population of Lebanon was made up of displaced persons from neighbouring countries. The Lebanese people were bitter about being ignored and sacrificed on the altar of the volatile power politics in the Middle East. Ordinary people in Lebanon believed that the rest of the world was unconcerned about how the country was going to survive the existential challenge facing it. The crisis response was underfunded. Existing funds were often directed through opaque channels without Government oversight and they did not reach host communities. The international approach to finding a durable solution in the Lebanon was deeply flawed. It seemed as if, slowly but irrevocably, integration was being forced upon it. How could a small, developing country with a population of 5 million be expected to accommodate 2 million displaced persons indefinitely and at the same time preserve its tolerance, democracy and religious fellowship?

61. The Lebanese armed forces were doing their best to curb the daunting surge in the number of migrants being smuggled into the country, but they needed support. Clashes were erupting between local communities and groups of some displaced persons. Municipalities were unable to cope with the latter's lawless behaviour. Resentment was growing. The overall security situation in the country was deteriorating.

62. While his Government cherished its good relations with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, they must adapt to the national context and respect the country's sovereignty. It counted on UNHCR to identify those Syrians who were economic migrants, and not therefore entitled to international protection, who abused the system. The data-sharing agreement was a step in the right direction and should be speedily implemented. International organizations working in the Lebanon should perhaps ask themselves if the aid that they were providing in an indiscriminate manner might not be fuelling unlawful migration camouflaged as forcible displacement. A durable solution to the ongoing refugee crisis in Lebanon would help to alleviate the plight of Lebanese and Syrians alike and would indisputably go some way towards easing simmering tensions in the Middle East.

63. **Mr. Zniber** (Morocco) said that meeting the needs of 130 million refugees would require urgent, concerted humanitarian and political efforts anchored in burden-sharing and responsibility-sharing if a healthy balance were to be maintained among all States. Displacement had risen by 60 per cent over the previous 20 years but, at the same time, technological and administrative barriers had become more impenetrable. It was therefore necessary to build bridges and to engage in debates that avoided politicization, manipulation and distortion.

64. Voluntary return was still the most preferable durable solution to humanitarian crises. However, the situation on the ground made it essential that States integrated the refugees for whom they were responsible. In Morocco refugees had the same access to basic services and the labour market as Moroccans. Morocco therefore put into practice the theme of World Refugee Day 2023, "Hope away from home". With the support of several international bodies, it was including refugees in its national health and social protection system in accordance with the Rabat Declaration to strengthen the global commitment to improve the health of refugees and migrants that had been adopted at the Third Global Consultation on the Health of Refugees and Migrants.

65. In view of the disturbing situation prevailing in the refugee camp in Tindouf, his Government called on the international community and donors to remind Algeria of its responsibility to allow UNHCR to take a census of the people being held in that camp.

66. It was to be hoped that the upcoming Global Refugee Forum would prove to be an opportunity to overcome divisions in order to support those who had been forced to flee from their homes.

67. **Ms. Milačić** (Montenegro) said that her Government strongly condemned the terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel and she conveyed its sympathy for the innocent lives lost on both sides. It was also sorrowed by the loss of life in the earthquake in Afghanistan.

68. On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was right to reassert allegiance to its principles of equality and non-discrimination. However, she noted with regret that, year after year, a growing number of civilians were compelled to flee from their homes by persecution, conflict and gross violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, as well as by the impact of climate change and environmental degradation that exacerbated economic hardship and poverty. That situation was compounded by the war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine, which continued to inflict heavy civilian casualties, large-scale destruction, global food instability and energy crises. In that geopolitical context, more and more countries were facing serious challenges that made it harder and harder to protect stateless persons and refugees. In view of the widening gap between their needs and the financial resources that were being provided, she welcomed the emphasis placed by UNHCR on closer partnership and cooperation as a means of mobilizing additional resources and she endorsed the call for greater burden- and responsibility-sharing and a stronger sense of solidarity.

69. Ukrainian refugees made up 5 per cent of the population of Montenegro. Montenegro remained committed to building an effective national system for the protection of persons in need that was based on the relevant international standards and instruments. For example, the implementation of the road map for cooperation between the European Asylum Support Office and Montenegro for 2022–2023 and the Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro for the period 2015–2025 should result in enhanced protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. The legal deadline for deciding whether to grant temporary protection had been reduced to six months. Accommodation facilities, especially those for vulnerable groups, were being expanded and free legal aid as well as psychosocial counselling and medical care were available for persons receiving temporary protection. Amendments to the Foreign Nationals Law had introduced simplified procedures for obtaining identification documents in a bid to prevent and reduce statelessness.

70. Her Government shared the High Commissioner's views on the importance of emphasizing an approach focused on human rights at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum.

71. **Ms. Belskaya** (Belarus) said that unilateral coercive measures against countries did indeed increase vulnerability and prompted forced displacement. Her Government supported efforts to resolve the refugee crisis. As a host country, Belarus was taking all the necessary steps to give asylum-seekers and displaced persons shelter, support and hope for the future. Its legislation made provision for the granting of refugee status and supplementary protection. The number of applications for protection that it had received in 2022 had increased fivefold. It was therefore to be hoped that a new reception centre in Minsk would soon come into operation. Education played a vital role for refugee children. The recommendations contained in the 2023 UNHCR annual refugee education report, entitled "Unlocking Potential: The Right to Education and Opportunity", were of relevance in respect not only of Ukrainian children but also of children from other regions whose language, culture and education system differed significantly from those of the host country. For example, in Belarus, Syrian and Afghan refugees received supplementary education in special centres. In Minsk alone, more than 200 schoolchildren and their parents were covered by those projects. Since March 2022, Belarus had been hosting refugees from the conflict in Ukraine to whom it granted humanitarian, financial and other forms of assistance. They had virtually the same access to medical and social services as Belarusians. Their children could attend school. Most Ukrainian refugees were families with children or older people. Reports that they had

been attacked by Belarusians were patently untrue. It was also necessary to deny accusations that the assistance provided by Belarus to the Ukrainian children fleeing the horrors of war was somehow akin to deportation. She invited the Secretary-General to visit Belarus to take stock of the situation on the spot.

72. Joint efforts and dialogue were clearly needed to address the causes of forced displacement. However, the requisite plans and strategies could not be put into effect without a climate of international cooperation. In many regions that climate was verging on the disastrous. For thousands of refugees that disaster took the form of cruel laws, walls and barbed-wire fences along borders, the risk of falling victim to transborder crime, deadly boat crossings or death in the cold forests and marshes on the eastern border of the European Union. To put an end to that situation, it was necessary to abandon the ideas and practices of political, economic and cultural dominance, the kindling and supporting of military conflicts for geopolitical purposes and the benefit of arms manufacturers and the use of force and sanctions in place of diplomacy. What was needed was political will and strict observance of the principles of equal rights and the sovereign equality of States. The Global Refugee Forum could be a big step towards closer cooperation between all States and solidarity with refugees.

73. **Ms. Nzenze** (Observer for Gabon) said that, in view of the multiple problems facing humanity, it was essential to coordinate action and to join together to meet the challenges inherent in the international protection of refugees. Her Government was dismayed by the vast number of men, women and children who had been forced to flee from their homes in search of safety. It was high time to adopt a more holistic approach to refugee policy that encompassed early warning, preventive diplomacy, the promotion of human rights and economic and social development. The transitional Government had affirmed its commitment to pursuing the country's legendary hospitality and to granting asylum to anyone who applied for it. The closure of the UNHCR office in Gabon inevitably meant that more responsibility had been placed on the National Commission for Refugees for honouring commitments to refugees and asylum-seekers for whom it was seeking sustainable solutions. The latter entailed socioeconomic integration, access to health care and education. To that end, the transitional Government had abolished school fees for all children.

74. She encouraged donors to abide by their commitments to ensure that refugees were efficiently protected and she therefore hoped that the decisions adopted at the current session of the Executive Committee would take the form of specific action plans fostering greater solidarity as a means of achieving such protection.

75. **Ms. Jardfelt** (Sweden) said that she wished to convey her Government's condolences for the loss of life in the earthquake in Afghanistan and the loss of life of innocent civilians in Israel and Gaza following the atrocious terrorist attacks by Hamas.

76. Responding to multiple emergencies had become the "new normal". The worst displacement crisis facing Europe since the Second World War had been triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Recent developments in Nagorno-Karabakh and the floods in Libya were reminders that conflict and climate-induced disasters were also drivers of forced displacement. At the same time, there was underreported but protracted displacement in many other places around the world where people in extremely vulnerable situations required continuous support from the international community. As the top donor of non-earmarked and multi-year funding in 2023, Sweden had contributed to efficient humanitarian intervention where and when it was most needed. It was well-known that humanitarian needs outstripped financing and that it was the most vulnerable who paid the price. In order truly to address the crisis, continued engagement by development actors as well as peace efforts were needed. Humanitarian bodies could not do all that was needed on their own. She therefore saluted UNHCR for its efforts to work closely with development actors to find lasting solutions.

77. Developments on the central Mediterranean route clearly showed that preventive responses were essential to address the migration situation. Capacity-building in countries of origin and transit was the key to preventing irregular migration. More coordinated efforts to address the root causes of displacement were also crucial. In particular, it was vital to counter the effects of and build resilience to climate change by investing in sustainable energy.

78. The Global Refugee Forum would provide an opportunity to take stock of and to reaffirm the collective commitment to the central tenants of global solidarity and responsibility-sharing.

79. Resettlement remained a sustainable and safe way to offer international protection and an act of solidarity with host countries. Receiving quota refugees should not be a task for only a few countries. Her Government planned to resettle 900 refugees in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM. Priority would be given to women, girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex refugees. Sweden was committed to placing protection at the heart of humanitarian action and to preventing risks and violence. It looked forward to seeing how the Global Protection Cluster could be strengthened to support the humanitarian system in order to respond to a growing number of crises. In conclusion, she wished to underscore the vital importance of the long-standing commitment and practice of UNHCR in considering factors such as age and gender diversity in planning and programming.

80. **Ms. Norton** (Canada) said that she wished to convey her Government's sincere condolences for the lives lost in the odious attack on Israel. Canada unequivocally condemned all forms of terrorism.

81. Although her Government was in favour of third-country solutions, it had supplied more than \$1.4 billion to finance humanitarian aid in Canada in 2022 in a bid to meet the needs of people affected by conflict and natural disasters. She echoed the High Commissioner's concern that the needs generated by new and prolonged crises and the increasingly serious disasters triggered by climate change far outstripped the resources available to contend with them. Clearly it would be necessary to make exceptionally tough decisions on priorities. Those decisions must be based on the specific needs of the most vulnerable persons, such as women, girls, children and young people, gender-diverse persons and persons living with disability. Forced displacement worsened existing vulnerability and systematic discrimination. All persons threatened with persecution deserved protection.

82. Alleviating the strain on the resources of generous host communities was fundamental to the commitments given under the Global Compact on Refugees. The efforts of UNHCR to leverage opportunities with development actors and support host communities in a spirit of shared responsibility was commendable. In her country, the Together for Learning campaign and the Charlevoix Education Initiative had brought together global stakeholders to meet the education needs of refugee and displaced children, especially girls, in countries affected by conflicts.

83. Canada also remained committed to the principles of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative and was pleased that its flexible and predictable funding enabled the forum to adapt quickly to evolving requirements. Her Government called upon all stakeholders at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum to reaffirm their commitment to more equitable and predictable burden-sharing, to strengthen comprehensive refugee responses through targeted needs-based responsive humanitarian assistance, to design innovative third-country solutions and to invest more in long-term development to address root causes and support host States. The gains made in adopting equity, anti-oppression and anti-racist values must not be lost. It was to be hoped that pledges at the Global Refugee Forum would transcend borders and create a future where no one was left behind, in recognition of the inherent value of upholding human rights for all. Work to advance durable solutions must be underpinned by the meaningful inclusion of refugees.

84. **Mr. Ealom** (Canada) said that Canada had been integrating refugee leadership by consulting civil society, establishing the Refugee Education Council and ensuring that persons who had themselves experienced displacement were included in its delegations. He welcomed the growing number of refugee advisers in national delegations and appealed to everyone to make a concerted effort towards inclusivity and accountability. Leveraging the experience and expertise of refugee organizations in the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes and policies would heighten the efficiency, cost-effectiveness and legitimacy of responses. He therefore urged UNHCR to ensure the meaningful participation of refugees and host communities at the local level. Organizations led by refugees had played a critical role in designing the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot, the aim of which was to improve the economic integration of skilled refugees. As nobody had a bigger stake in

ensuring reliable protection and promoting durable solutions than refugees themselves, he called on all present to recognize the rich cultural diversity, skills, talents and experience that refugees could contribute to societies and economies.

85. **Mr. Staniulis** (Lithuania) said that he wished to express his Government's condolences to the victims of the tragic terrorist attack against Israel. It condemned the actions of Hamas in the strongest terms. It shared the High Commissioner's concern about the growing need for humanitarian assistance to refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons. It highly valued the work of UNHCR in safeguarding the rights and well-being of all refugees. Since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, over 80,000 Ukrainians, 35 per cent of whom were children, had received shelter in his country. Support for those refugees had amounted to over €400 million. Over 51,000 temporary residence permits had been issued to Ukrainian refugees. The aftermath of the war would have long-term consequences for the people, security and natural environment not only of Ukraine but also worldwide. In that context, the international community must unite to take all the necessary measures to end the cause of human suffering, namely the brutal war of Russia. The flight of over 100,000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia was yet another challenge facing that country and the international community. His Government had supplied over €350,000 in humanitarian aid along with medical and other equipment worth more than €90,000. It called on other States, UNHCR and other international organizations to step up their support for Armenia in that challenging situation.

86. His Government and others in the region remained concerned about the actions of the authorities of Belarus in using irregular migration flows from third countries into the European Union for their own ends. He urged UNHCR to address that phenomenon with the Belarusian authorities, as it clearly jeopardized the international protection of asylum-seekers. The growing challenges to the protection of refugees, particularly of women, children, persons living with disability and other vulnerable displaced persons meant that the gender-sensitive approaches of UNHCR were of vital importance in order to address the specific needs of women and girls. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to combat all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. New methods of tackling those issues them should be discussed in more detail at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, along with ways of promoting the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and the sharing of good practice. He trusted that new pledges related to the objectives of the Compact would be announced. Lithuania was committed to continuing its political, operational and financial support for UNHCR.

87. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that he wished to convey his Government's deepest condolences to Israel and the Israeli people for the lives lost in the heinous attacks on Israel. The hostages kidnapped by Hamas must be released and civilians must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law. He also wished to express solidarity with the people of Afghanistan in the wake of the devastating earthquake in Herat Province.

88. He reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the application of the letter and spirit of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and encouraged States which were not parties to it to consider accession to that instrument. His Government was deeply concerned about the elevated levels of forced displacement and deplored the fact that unscrupulous criminals and human traffickers were profiting from human suffering and abusing people on the move. He commended UNHCR staff for the efforts to deliver assistance in exceedingly difficult circumstances and condemned all forms of violence against humanitarian personnel. He deplored the violations of international humanitarian law, civilian casualties and destruction of critical civilian infrastructure in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. More than 2 million Ukrainians had entered Bulgaria since the beginning of the war. Some 170,000 had been registered for temporary protection and over 60,000 were still in Bulgarian territory. His Government continued to offer them the same access to the labour market, health care, accommodation, social welfare and education as Bulgarian citizens. In September 2023, a working group had been set up to devise a new programme of humanitarian assistance for and the integration of displaced persons from Ukraine, the purpose of which was to offer them better living conditions.

89. Bulgaria was gravely concerned about the deteriorating security, humanitarian and human rights situation in Afghanistan, especially with regard to Afghan women and girls and

called for the immediate cancellation of the de facto authorities' decision to prohibit female staff from working for non-governmental organizations. Women had the right to participate in humanitarian action and in all spheres of public, social, economic and political life.

90. He encouraged UNHCR to enable the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies, programmes and activities related to humanitarian responses. Bulgaria was committed to the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and was prepared to play its part in global efforts to address the complex challenges of forced displacement. He commended UNHCR on progress achieved with internal reforms and in coordinating its action better with other humanitarian actors. He encouraged it to pay attention to risk management and to pursue measures to enforce zero tolerance of sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse and of corruption and other forms of misconduct.

91. He called on everyone to stand up for human rights and to strive to make the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality in daily life. Everybody had the right to life, to live in freedom and safety and to seek and enjoy asylum and flee from persecution.

92. **Mr. Chuquihuara Chil** (Peru) said that his Government expressed its solidarity with the victims of the violence that had erupted in the Middle East at the end of the previous week and earnestly hoped that peace would soon be restored.

93. Against the background of war, economic crises and the repercussions of climate change, Peru had staunchly maintained its position on the protection of displaced persons through their inclusion in a democratic society resting on the principles of equality and justice. Since it was a country committed to the protection and promotion of human rights without discrimination, it had taken in more than one and half million Venezuelan citizens, 618,000 of whom had sought asylum. In fact, it had the largest number of Venezuelan asylum-seekers in the world. His Government had scrupulously respected its obligations under international standards. National law allowed asylum-seekers and refugees under State protection to stay in the country and work. At the same time, it was necessary to look at new mechanisms to strengthen durable solutions.

94. However national capacity to continue to supply assistance and protection to migrants and refugees required the backing of the international community in the form of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. While the number of persons of concern was rising, financial contributions to UNHCR were falling and its budget for operations in Peru had dropped substantially. He therefore renewed the call for international community not to lose sight of the thousands of persons in Latin America and the Caribbean who needed assistance. It had to be remembered that humanitarian crises and the migration movements triggered by them gave rise to shared responsibility. For that reason, the international community should back the efforts of host countries in accordance with the principles and standards of international law. His country would make a constructive contribution to the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum in keeping with his tradition of protecting refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons and internally displaced persons and would continue its quest for durable solutions to the various challenges faced by them.

95. **Mr. Matjama** (Lesotho) said that the refugees programme of Lesotho reflected its unwavering commitment to those escaping conflict and persecution. It had extended safety and shelter to a considerable number of refugees through the services of a reception centre and refugee support system.

96. While substantial progress had been made in ensuring that refugee children had access to education, language barriers, the non-recognition of qualifications and economic constraints still hindered the successful integration of refugees in society. Despite the establishment of clinics in refugee camps and collaboration with health-care organizations, impediments to obtaining specialized medical treatment included poor transport and cultural factors. However, health centres had been equipped with civil registries in order that children born of refugee families could be entered in the civil registry database. Community integration initiatives which had been launched to promote understanding between refugees and their host communities had helped to lower tension and enhance social cohesion.

97. There was a need to strengthen the domestic legal framework to protect and uphold refugees' rights in accordance with international instruments. Although the refugee programme had reached some commendable milestones in providing security and assistance for those in need, it was vital to acknowledge the need for increased funding, expanded educational and vocational opportunities, better access to health care and stronger legal protection in order to improve the lives of those seeking refuge within the country's borders.

98. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that he wished to thank the Government of Uruguay not only for its efforts to provide refugees with an identity document and to integrate them, but also for its support for various regional schemes. He was grateful to Peru for its integration of a huge number of refugees. He very much agreed that international support, including through development banks, was of fundamental importance. His Office would try to see how development banks could participate in the response to the migration crisis. He thanked Canada for highlighting the fact that, when resources were in short supply, it was necessary to ensure that priority went to the most vulnerable refugees. However, given the shortfall in resources setting priorities itself proved difficult. He commended Canada on its inclusion of a refugee representative in its delegation and ensuring that his words formed a substantive part of the delegation's statement. It was an example of the way in which refugees should participate in the Committee's deliberations.

99. He thanked Gabon for the numerous commitments made in the course of its delegation's statement. His Office was confident about the capacity of the National Commission for Refugees to manage cases as it had done in the past. The statement made by the representative of Lesotho showed what many small countries were endeavouring to do to improve the way refugees were treated. His Office would be happy to work on overcoming the challenges that had been outlined. He wished to convey his Office's condolences to the Government and people of Morocco for the loss of life in the earthquake that had struck the country. He thanked Morocco for its constructive cooperation in handling mixed movements. Extending health cover to refugees and asylum-seekers was highly commendable. Retraining a spirit of unity within the Committee was indeed vitally needed in order to contend with the challenges facing it. It was essential to overcome political tensions.

100. The representative of Yemen had drawn attention to a conflict that had been somewhat forgotten. His words had reminded all those present of the horrors of a conflict that was affecting millions of extremely vulnerable people, including many who had been displaced. He therefore hoped that the efforts made by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen to provide support for the peace process would prove successful. He appreciated that Yemen was both a host country and a country of transit and that more resources were needed. His Office was aware of the huge responsibilities for Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian refugees that Jordan had shouldered for generations. He was pleased to note that Jordan had always been open to innovative approaches to dealing with that complicated situation, despite the pressures that it faced owing to its geographical position. Some of those approaches should be revitalized. Voluntary, dignified, sustainable return to the Syrian Arab Republic was one of the solutions that should be discussed. Any satisfactory outcome would require international cooperation to create conditions in which people had the confidence to return. Lebanon shared many of the same challenges as Jordan. He could understand the frustration with the deadlock it had been facing, which constituted an additional burden for a country that was undergoing a political and economic crisis.

101. The Government of Belarus was plainly working to strengthen its asylum capacity and its ability to promote its services' coverage of certain groups of refugees. His Office would continue to provide support for those efforts. However, it was concerned by reports of people trying to cross the borders of Belarus into the European Union because of the risk that many of those people might become stranded on those borders. It would therefore continue to request access to them. It has been interesting to hear about the high percentage of Ukrainian refugees in the population of Montenegro. He appreciated the improvements that the Government was making in the management of asylum-seekers and stateless persons. Sweden was one of the Office's biggest supporters and partners both in terms of the volume of financial contributions and of the percentage of non-earmarked funding. It was also a champion of multi-year funding which made it possible for the Office to engage in much better planning of support for host countries. He therefore encouraged more countries to

follow its example. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee was working to make protection central to humanitarian action and looking to see how it could improve its protection work. Lithuania had made a substantial contribution to the work of UNHCR by hosting many Ukrainian refugees. His Office was also concerned about the risk of exploiting refugees, migrants and vulnerable people for selfish purposes. That was something that should never happen. He congratulated Bulgaria on celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of its accession to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which remained a fundamental instrument for the protection of refugees. Although his Office was not an anti-trafficking organization, it was concerned about the exploitation of the misery of refugees by traffickers. It was therefore always happy to contribute advice when the IOM and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime were planning measures to deal with that scourge.

*The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.*