



General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 December 2023

Original: English
English, French and Spanish only

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

Summary record of the 763rd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 13 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)

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

Other statements

1. **Ms. Meynet** (Staff Council) said that it was with deep sorrow that the Staff Council had learned of the deaths of 12 United Nations colleagues in Gaza. While it was always necessary to be on the frontline to help those in need, nothing could justify the loss of those lives.
2. Several events and security incidents had led to the evacuation of staff of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the field during the past year. All colleagues and their families had been safely evacuated from the Sudan under very stressful conditions. Staff working in precarious situations, for instance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and the Niger, were frequently required to take decisions themselves regarding their safety and that of their families. Several countries had been struck by natural disasters in recent weeks, such as earthquakes in Morocco and Afghanistan and floods in Libya. Earlier in the year, the earthquake on the border of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic had claimed the lives of four colleagues. Yet UNHCR staff had continued to deliver assistance to those in need.
3. The current financial crisis had created major difficulties for colleagues around the world, who feared for their jobs, their income and their families. The Staff Council was looking carefully into the consequences that the budget would have in the current year and hoped that the measures under discussion to minimize the effects of staff cuts would garner support. Such measures should include, for instance, a voluntary separation package and other measures involving reordering priorities and retraining. The possible impact on gender and diversity of the workforce should also be borne in mind. The Staff Council appreciated the plan to move national staff into the international staff category and to include some positions in the national staff category, while being mindful that, in many situations, international professionals were required.
4. The modernization of UNHCR technology was a welcome development and the Staff Council encouraged the human resource leadership to promote the adoption of new tools by staff of all categories and ages.
5. It was important to acknowledge the services of longer-serving colleagues, who were still willing, despite their experience in dangerous and challenging field locations, to participate in operations where their experience was particularly welcome. Although new expertise was required to cope with major changes and technology challenges, internal colleagues should be prioritized.
6. The Staff Council welcomed action to address sexual harassment and called for greater protection against retaliation for colleagues who spoke up. Cases of abuse of authority and bullying should also be addressed given their negative impact on staff morale.
7. The Staff Council thanked the High Commissioner for his defence and advocacy. It hoped that needs would be matched with pledges at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 so that no long-standing or recent operations were underfunded. The resources of staff in places like South Sudan, Armenia, Afghanistan and the Americas were frequently inadequate and required commitment, creativity and compassion.
8. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the UNHCR workforce played a vital role in 135 countries and 550 locations around the globe. Their work and leadership as well as their contribution to UNHCR policies and flexible work were greatly appreciated. The issues of reduction in the workforce and realignment were difficult both for staff members and for their families. The Division of Human Resources and the entire organization were seeking ways and means to mitigate their impact. It would be extremely important in that context for the Staff Council to remain united and ensure that its voice was heard.
9. **The Chair** said that the Executive Committee greatly appreciated the courage and dedication of UNHCR staff and encouraged them to continue to serve the noble cause. The Committee counted on the Staff Council to keep it abreast of developments affecting staff.

Programme of work of the Standing Committee

Consideration of the provisional agenda of the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee

10. **The Chair** said that a number of draft decisions fell under the two agenda items, which would be considered together. She recalled that the Rapporteur had introduced draft decision 1 on the programme budget for 2024 at the previous meeting ([A/AC.96/74/762](#)) and invited him to do the same for the remaining draft decisions, which had been reviewed by Executive Committee members in informal consultations.

11. **Mr. Gul** (Rapporteur) said that draft decision 2 dealt with the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2024, as established in the 2004 decision on working methods. The meeting scheduled for March 2024 would focus on operations, the meeting scheduled for June or July 2024 would focus on the international protection and programme policy, and the meeting scheduled for September 2024 would be devoted to management, finance, oversight and human resources. The draft decision authorized the Committee to add or delete items, as appropriate, and to request member States to meet in December 2023 to prepare a detailed workplan. It also called on UNHCR to be explicit and analytical in its reports to the Standing Committee and to submit documentation in a timely manner. In addition, it underscored the importance of a substantive and interactive debate in meetings and the need to respect the purely humanitarian and non-political nature of the Executive Committee's work.

12. Draft decision 3 addressed observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee from October 2023 to October 2024. The standard provisional agenda for the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee would be adopted under draft decision 4, and draft decision 5 addressed the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee.

13. Draft decision 6 on the multi-year workplan for Executive Committee conclusions was the result of multiple rounds of informal preparatory consultations and several bilateral and group discussions among member States. Agreement had been reached on the text at a meeting on 29 May 2023 and it had been circulated to all States members of the Executive Committee on 30 May 2023. The draft decision reaffirmed the important role of the Executive Committee in forging consensus on vital issues related to international protection and durable solutions and in developing policies and standards. Based on the draft decision, the member States agreed to consider and develop an Executive Committee conclusion on durable solutions and complementary pathways in 2024, a conclusion on climate action relating to UNHCR activities in 2025 and a conclusion on education in 2026. In addition, the Committee members agreed to produce a technical update on the conclusion No. 110 (LXI) on refugees with disabilities and other persons with disabilities protected and assisted by UNHCR. The impact of hosting would also continue to be measured.

14. Draft decision 7, which concerned the simultaneous distribution of documents of the Executive Committee, was a technical update of a similar decision that had been adopted in 2016, since it was virtually impossible, for procedural reasons, for the Office to submit several documents within the established deadlines in all six official languages of the United Nations.

15. **The Chair** said that the Central African Republic, Cuba, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Liberia, Malaysia, the Niger, Sierra Leone and Ukraine had submitted official requests to participate in the meetings of the Standing Committee as observers. She suggested that the names of those States should be added to the agreed text of draft decision 3.

16. *It was so decided.*

17. **The Chair** said she took it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft decisions.

18. *It was so decided.*

Election of officers

19. **Mr. Begeç** (Türkiye) nominated Ms. Stasch (Germany) for the office of Chair.
20. **Mr. Daka** (Ethiopia) seconded the nomination.
21. *Ms. Stasch (Germany) was elected Chair by acclamation.*
22. **Ms. Fuentes Julio** (Chile) nominated Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador) for the office of first Vice-Chair.
23. **Ms. Díaz-Rato Revuelta** (Spain) seconded the nomination.
24. *Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador) was elected first Vice-Chair by acclamation.*
25. **The Chair** said that the Group of Asia-Pacific States, which was responsible for nominating the second Vice-Chair, required further consultations to reach an agreement. She therefore proposed that the election of the Vice-Chair should be deferred until the Group agreed on the person to be nominated.
26. *It was so decided.*
27. **Ms. Mboukou Kimbatsa** (Congo) nominated Ms. Namono (Uganda) for the office of Rapporteur.
28. **Mr. Olfato** (Philippines) seconded the nomination.
29. *Ms. Namono (Uganda) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*
30. **Ms. Stasch** (Germany) said that, given the huge challenges ahead in terms of climate change and armed conflicts, it was essential to focus on what united rather than divided host countries, donor countries and countries of origin. She knew very well from the history of her own country how important it was to give shelter to those who were forced to flee from their homes until they could return. Burden-sharing was not an abstract concept but a daily reality for communities, parliaments and Governments. She appealed to all States to be courageous in tackling humanitarian challenges, to recognize the contributions that could be made by both host and donor countries, and to support the valuable work of UNHCR, its staff and their families at a time when the Office was facing tough decisions.

Adoption of the report of the seventy-fourth session of the Executive Committee
(A/78/12/Add.1)

31. **The Chair** said that members would now consider the draft report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its seventy-fourth session, which reflected the decisions adopted during the plenary meetings and had been made available to delegations the previous day.
32. **Mr. Gul** (Rapporteur) said that sections I and II of the report provided an overview of the work done during the preceding four days of the session. The paragraph on the election of the officers for the seventy-fifth session would be amended to reflect the results of the election that had just taken place. Section III contained the decisions that had been adopted at the seventy-fourth session, namely, the decisions on the 2024 budget, the 2024 programme of work of the Standing Committee, observer participation, the provisional agenda for the seventy-fifth session of the Executive Committee, the participation of intergovernmental organizations in private meetings of the Executive Committee, a multi-year workplan for Executive Committee conclusions and the simultaneous distribution of documents of the Executive Committee. Once adopted, the report would be submitted to the Third Committee for consideration, as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report.
33. *The draft report of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on its seventy-fourth session was adopted.*

Closing of the session

34. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, refugee law and other international legal norms were on the rise around the world. In the preceding days alone, a camp for displaced

persons had been bombed in Myanmar, violence had flared again in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and people had fled brutal attacks in the Sahel. War raged in Ukraine and the Sudan, and the devastating cycle of conflict in the Middle East had once again erupted. He echoed the Secretary-General's call for the protection of all civilians and civilian infrastructure in accordance with international humanitarian law. As the people on whose behalf he spoke were often victims of hate campaigns, it was crucial to ensure that hate speech, including hate speech motivated by antisemitism or Islamophobia, was not tolerated.

35. The conflicts that he had mentioned were occurring at a time when the resources and capacity of all major humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, were stretched to the limit and all faced political and security constraints.

36. He welcomed delegations' announcements during the session of the pledges that their countries would make at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, especially those to be made by major host countries. He hoped that other host countries would make policy pledges as well, in particular to promote the inclusion of refugees, and that, in the spirit of responsibility-sharing, other countries would match those commitments. The international community could not leave a handful of hosts to receive, protect and care for the vast majority of the world's refugees. He wished to appeal, in particular, for much greater support from countries that were neither major hosts nor major donors.

37. Many delegations had reaffirmed their support for the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. He wished to encourage States that had not yet ratified or acceded to those instruments to do so.

38. He appreciated the support expressed by delegations for UNHCR staff around the world. Delegations had noted how much UNHCR staff could accomplish when adequately resourced. He therefore repeated his appeal for greater, more predictable and more flexible contributions to help address the funding shortfall. With more multi-year and unearmarked funding, UNHCR could provide more equitable responses to different crises. The earmarking of funds predetermined where resources would be allocated, irrespective of needs, and made it more difficult for UNHCR to ramp up and scale down operations.

39. Every year, UNHCR prioritized all its operations and interventions. Part of its reason for doing so was that only about 50 per cent of its budget was funded. While UNHCR would continue to prioritize its efforts and seek ways to work even more efficiently, it must be recognized that if it had to keep doing more with less, it would at some point become unable to fulfil its mandate.

40. It would have been helpful to hear more from delegations on the importance of addressing the impact of the climate emergency on population movements and the need to include displaced persons in national climate action plans. Displaced persons must be given a greater say in climate strategies.

41. As the numbers of displaced persons continued to rise around the world, collective action was needed on the part of the international community to help those displaced, ease pressures on host countries and communities, enhance refugees' self-reliance, expand third-country solutions and help bring about conditions in countries of origin that were conducive to a safe and dignified return.

42. **The Chair**, after expressing her gratitude to all those who had helped her steer the work of the Executive Committee during the previous year, declared closed the seventy-fourth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.