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

Distr.: General
16 April 2024

English only

Standing Committee

Eighty-ninth meeting

13–15 March 2024

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva

Summary record,* Wednesday, 13 March 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch(Germany)

Contents

Regional activities and global programmes (*continued*)

- a. Regional updates (*continued*)
- ii. Southern Africa (*continued*)
- iii. West and Central Africa
- iv. Americas

* Summary records, prepared by external service providers, summarize the discussions and record decisions taken. Though extensive, they do not represent a verbatim record of the proceedings. Corrections to a summary record should concern only errors made regarding, for example, an official title, and a statistic or a statement reflected from the discussion. A correction does not allow for any additions or for changes to be made of a political character. Any proposed substantive corrections will be checked against the sound recording of the meeting before any change can be made. Requests for corrections should be sent to the ExCom Secretariat: excom@unhcr.org, and any corrected records will be reissued with a new date. Feedback on the summary records may also be sent to the ExCom Secretariat for consideration in the preparation of future summaries.

The meeting was called to order at 3.06 p.m.

3. Regional Activities and Global Programmes *(continued)*

a. Regional updates *(continued)*

ii. Southern Africa *(continued)*

1. The representative of **Zambia** congratulated Ms. Chansa Kapaya on her appointment as Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa. Zambia had a proud history of extending refuge to those in need. It currently hosted 98,085 asylum-seekers, refugees and former Angolan and Rwandan refugees who lived in the refugee settlements of Mayukwayukwa, Meheba and Mantapala and in urban areas, particularly Lusaka, and the Copperbelt province. As at 29 February 2024, her country had also hosted 62,660 refugees and asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2. However, like many nations in the region, Zambia faced a complex humanitarian situation marked by socioeconomic disparities, food insecurity, disease outbreaks and natural disasters. The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had significantly contributed to the influx of forcibly displaced persons seeking asylum within its borders at a time when the Office faced further obstacles in the form of funding deficits and the effects of global crises. In 2024, the El Niño phenomenon presented additional challenges and her Government had declared the current drought a national disaster and emergency. Her country had also grappled with a cholera outbreak that endangered the health and education sectors and the economic stability of both citizens and persons of concern. She called on UNHCR and the international community to reassess budgetary allocations to Zambia and ensure that adequate resources were allocated in order to address the myriad challenges in refugee protection and management.

3. Her Government had embarked on strategic initiatives for critical impact areas, including the recent launch of the first National Refugee Policy and Implementation Plan, a ground-breaking endeavour that would ensure the effective management of all matters pertaining to refugees and facilitate a coordinated approach. Central to that Policy was Zambia's commitment to meeting its international obligations, including as a signatory to, among other instruments, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Policy reflected her Government's commitment to implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework through a holistic approach to refugee management.

4. Despite her country's long-standing history of hosting refugees and respect for international obligations, challenges such as inadequacies in reception and admission systems; limited provision of social services, livelihood opportunities and durable solutions; and insufficient inclusion of refugees in national development programmes persisted. The Policy focused on protection, refugee welfare and rights, access to essential services and justice, improved civil registration and documentation, livelihood opportunities and durable solutions. It sought to foster coexistence between refugee and local communities and to strengthen partnerships between the Government, local stakeholders and international partners.

5. Zambia was actively implementing the Modernization of Refugee and Host Community Settlement Areas Project with a view to harmonization of the legislation on refugee management, infrastructure development, refugee operations and the creation of economic activities in refugee settlements. The electrification of the Meheba Refugee Settlement was already under way through a collaborative effort involving the Zambian Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, the Rural Electrification Authority and UNHCR.

6. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Zambia had made pledges covering a wide array of initiatives, including, among others, enhanced local integration, diversified livelihoods, digitized civil registration, comprehensive inclusion in education and access to electricity. Addressing the humanitarian challenges in her country required sustained collaboration, increased funding and a comprehensive approach. Her Government remained steadfast in its commitment to working alongside the Office's partners and the international community to ensure the protection and well-being of forcibly displaced persons.

7. The representative of **Zimbabwe** said that she welcomed the broad initiatives under way in the region, congratulated the new Regional Director on her appointment and assured her of

Zimbabwe's support. In light of the protracted refugee situation in Angola, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe; the problem of infectious diseases; and climate-change-induced natural disasters, exacerbated by the El Niño effect, she welcomed the Office's intention to address the issue of emergency preparedness and help communities to build resilience. She urged it to work closely with other United Nations agencies such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to take action in anticipation of the looming drought in her region during the current farming season.

8. She recalled from the conference room paper that UNHCR had carried out health assessments in Angola, the Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe and noted with concern that as a result of the Office's policy on the central procurement of drugs, her country had received no deliveries through the central procurement system in 2023, endangering the lives of hundreds of persons. The system's bureaucracy was affecting health outcomes and required critical attention. Furthermore, while Zimbabwe was listed as one of the ten countries in the region to which the Office was making cash transfers, the programme was being implemented under WFP auspices. She urged the Office to work with the Programme on that issue.

9. With regard to durable solutions, there was a general lack of policy consistency regarding voluntary repatriation. For example, UNHCR had been supporting the repatriation of Burundians from the United Republic of Tanzania and Mozambique, but not from Zimbabwe. She requested the Office to address the problem of information asymmetry, assist with voluntary repatriation and provide additional funding as only 11 per cent of the budget had been released to date. Underfunding had negative implications for the education of people of concern to UNHCR in her country and undermined achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and especially the ultimate vision of leaving no one and no place behind on development. To date, 68 children had been unable to proceed to advanced level studies owing to funding gaps.

10. The conference room paper showed that UNHCR would prioritize age, gender and diversity in the region in 2024 and her Government was deeply concerned at the failure to align those priorities with needs on the ground. As the region was faced with imminent drought, the persistence of infectious diseases and underfunding, she urged the Office to focus on life-saving initiatives and help communities to build resilience in the face of disasters induced by climate change. It was vital for UNHCR to continue to be guided by the needs of host countries. Lastly, she welcomed the High Commissioner's personal efforts in returning the humanitarian situation in the Sudan to the attention of the international community and hoped that it would receive the assistance that it deserved.

11. The representative of **South Africa** congratulated the new Assistant High Commissioner for Protection on her appointment and welcomed the Assistant High Commissioner's decision to visit South Africa to discuss international protection issues with its Minister of Home Affairs. Her Government had prepared a draft white paper on citizenship, immigration and refugee protection, which had been circulated for public consultation. The draft aimed to harmonize three key pieces of immigration legislation – the 1995 Citizenship Act, the 1998 Refugee Act and the 2002 Immigration Act – and to strengthen the Border Management Authority, which was tasked with addressing the issue of trafficking in persons. Those reforms were intended to enhance international protection as one of South Africa's international commitments, taking its level of development into consideration.

12. Her Government welcomed the support of UNHCR and other United Nations bodies for its efforts to strengthen social cohesion within host communities. Mixed movements of persons through the East Africa-Zimbabwe and West Africa-Democratic Republic of the Congo and Lesotho corridors were challenging its ability to offer international protection to those who deserved it. She noted the Office's efforts, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to focus on a route-based approach and called on UNHCR to collaborate closely with the Member States concerned to ensure its successful implementation.

13. In addition to the socioeconomic inequalities, conflicts, food insecurity and fragile systems and natural disasters from which displaced persons and their host communities had suffered over the past year, the outbreak of diseases in areas with limited health services, tropical storms, cyclones and severe droughts continued to undermine the fragile economies of the region. Those competing new emergencies were forcing the Office to make painful funding reductions in critical areas such as health, education and shelter, yet the 2024 budget allocation of \$492.2 million was the lowest received by any of the world's regions.

14. The representative of **Belgium** said that her Government strongly supported UNHCR and its refugee assistance mandate, especially in the difficult context of rising global needs and declining financial resources. Flexible funding was the best way to ensure that humanitarian organizations could set their priorities where the needs were greatest so that forgotten crises could receive the humanitarian response that they required. Forgotten crises were one of the priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and of the European Humanitarian Forum, to be held in Brussels during the following week. She therefore welcomed the Office's annual report on its most underfunded situations.

15. In previous years, more than half of the humanitarian funding that Belgium allocated to UNHCR had been unearmarked and her Government was committed to remaining a stable and predictable donor. In line with its decision to support the reception and protection of migrants and refugees in Europe, it would increase its flexible funding by €3 million in 2024.

16. She noted with interest the Office's route-based approach to mixed migration. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Belgium had joined the multi-stakeholder pledge and encouraged other Member States to do so as well. It had also joined the pledge in the context of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by undertaking to include forcibly displaced persons more systematically in all of its development cooperation programmes. To that end, her Government was developing a new cooperation programme in the Sahel region on the resilience of internally displaced persons and their host communities, with a special focus on Mali, and its earmarked funding for Africa would focus on that region, particularly Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and on the Great Lakes region, particularly the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

17. She welcomed the Office's cooperation with the World Bank and encouraged it to work with other international financial institutions to create innovative partnerships in the search for sustainable solutions. In line with the recent Multilateral Organisation Performance Network (MOPAN) assessment, her Government encouraged UNHCR to enhance its transparency and would welcome additional information on core funding allocations and the way in which priorities were chosen during implementation phases in light of budget constraints. It would also be useful to know whether the areas mentioned in the comprehensive needs assessment had been weighted differently from one another. Given the large gaps between assessed needs and funding, she requested detailed information on how the budget had been adopted.

18. In closing, she stressed her Government's support for all of the measures taken to protect and assist the victims of gender-based violence, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where the humanitarian needs situation was reaching intolerable levels.

19. The representative of the **United States of America** said that southern Africa faced an expanding list of challenges, including declining access to asylum, difficult economic conditions, large-scale mixed migration, increasing food insecurity, climate events and ongoing violence, particularly in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Mozambique. She applauded the leadership and generosity of the southern African states that had hosted refugees for decades and commended those that, despite the challenges, kept their borders open to asylum-seekers and offered international protection in the form of refugee status to new arrivals.

20. Her Government appreciated the Office's focus on data collection. If the international community did not know the extent of the challenges it faced or the efficacy of its responses, it could not effectively address them. Efforts to collect and share high-quality data on nutrition, health, water and shelter would produce better responses, prioritize aid where it was most needed and improve the quality of international support.

21. She shared the Office's concern about rising food insecurity and ration cuts for refugee populations. Access to sufficient food was at the core of refugee assistance and food security decreased when ration levels dropped, particularly where refugees did not have freedom of movement or opportunities to work legally. Increased opportunities for refugee self-reliance were part of the solution but required policy changes. Child protection and the prevention of gender-based violence were not the exclusive realm of protection-focused actors; they were everyone's responsibility.

22. The prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse was also critical and her Government would continue to support efforts to bring protection to the forefront of all responses. As global humanitarian emergencies proliferated, she encouraged the Office to focus on prioritization and

urged other donors, development actors and international financial institutions to include refugees in their work with host countries, particularly in protracted displacement situations. Until there was peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, long-staying refugee populations across the region were anticipated. Her Government pledged to support the Office's efforts to meet the needs identified.

23. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Southern Africa** (UNHCR), responding to questions on the statement by the Director of the Regional Bureau for the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, said that UNHCR and IOM were coordinating their data management efforts concerning internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. They were co-chairing a solutions working group in Mozambique and hoped that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would join them.

24. At the Regional Bureau level, UNHCR and IOM were sharing data on mixed movements in the region. They were planning to develop regional responses to those movements and to establish a coordination mechanism or platform. In 2023, the Office had supported the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in developing a protection strategy for the period 2023–2025, which would include an assessment of areas of return and relocation and of willingness of refugees to return. She believed that through that strategy, the stakeholders, including the Government of Mozambique, were following the advice received.

25. The Office anticipated that with the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), its responsibilities with regard to the protection of civilians would increase. It remained committed to staying and delivering, especially through its leading sectors: protection, shelter, and camp coordination and management. UNHCR had been conducting protection monitoring in 12 of the country's 26 provinces and in 2022, its protection monitoring exercise had collected data on some 80,000 incidents, including 6,000 cases of gender-based violence. In 2023, those numbers had increased to 114,000 and 9,000, respectively. However, the limited resources available were likely to have a negative impact on that work and it would be difficult to fill the gap left by the Mission.

26. Zambia's progressive refugee policy and action plan were a step in the right direction, as was its engagement with development partners such as the World Bank. That approach would also help to address some of the funding shortfalls that the country's representative had mentioned, especially with regard to the urbanization of settlements and infrastructure improvements. She hoped that the World Bank International Development Association grant received would help to fill the gap in funding.

27. She thanked Zimbabwe for the land that it had allocated – some 100 hectares – to agriculture. She believed that the ongoing returns to Burundi were voluntary and hoped that additional refugees in both Burundi and Zimbabwe would also volunteer, in which case UNHCR would work with the Government to ensure that those who wished to return were helped to do so.

28. The Office stood ready to support South Africa and other countries in implementation of the route-based approach. That work had already begun and the regional coordination platform to be established in cooperation with IOM would include both mixed movements and a regional refugee response plan.

iii. West and Central Africa

29. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa** (UNHCR) thanked all stakeholders for their support for the Office's operations in the West and Central Africa region. At the previous meeting of the Standing Committee, the total number of people whom UNHCR had served in the region had stood at 13.1 million. In 2024, that number was expected to increase to 14.3 million, driven mainly by the situation in the Sudan, as a result of which over half a million refugees had arrived in Chad since April 2023. Although the number of displaced persons had doubled since 2019, the region continued to welcome, protect and provide opportunities for those in need. However, it might be wondered how long those States could sustain their asylum policies if support from the international community decreased and how that community could support them in their efforts.

30. Chad had always been a generous host country and, until recently, had hosted large refugee populations. For that reason, the Office's interventions had focused on inclusion and solutions. At present, however, urgent action was needed in order to address critical gaps in meeting the

fundamental needs of Sudanese refugees and the Office's resource capacity was limited to emergency response. Member States that had sent missions to Chad would have an understanding of the scale of human suffering and the logistical and financial impediments to addressing urgent needs in the remote eastern part of the country. So numerous were the daily arrivals that camps had been expanded and new ones built. He therefore thanked the Government of Chad for making land available to refugees.

31. However, the relocation of refugees from border areas to new sites, while a protection and security imperative, was beyond the Office's capacity. UNHCR had increased its efforts to engage with development actors, notably the World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB), recognizing that long-term solutions were needed from the onset of a crisis in order to help people transition from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance. Because many of the Sudanese who had sought refuge in Chad were educated and skilled, their own competencies could be leveraged in their favour and their integration into existing national services should be pursued.

32. The crisis in the Sahel had been losing visibility, yet it had ramifications far beyond the region. In 2023, over 100,000 people from Burkina Faso had sought refuge in the coastal countries of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo as a result of insecurity, conflict, political instability and competition for scarce resources. Against that backdrop, the region was undergoing a geopolitical realignment with far-reaching impacts. The people whom UNHCR served and the rural communities that hosted them were among the most impacted, with sanctions exacerbating precarious economic outcomes.

33. In Mali, the failure to renew the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) had restricted the humanitarian space by placing the security and logistical burden on UNHCR and its partners, cutting people off from aid and pushing them to seek safety in neighbouring countries and, increasingly, further afield as part of mixed movements into Europe. The Office would stay and deliver for the forcibly displaced in the Sahel region, giving priority to community-level interventions aimed at helping them to become more cohesive, better equipped to absorb shocks and more able to sustainably host, protect, include and empower displaced persons.

34. He recalled the \$630 million budgetary requirement for Chad under the Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and warned that almost half a million displaced persons in the eastern part of that country would lose access to food aid during the current month. The reality of increasing needs and decreasing funding was progressively acute and there was concern about the impact on emergency response and programmes for protracted caseloads. While UNHCR was making every effort to integrate refugees and implement solutions, displaced populations still relied on it for their protection needs and survival.

35. A concerning dynamic had heightened the complexity of the situation in the West and Central Africa and threatened to undermine the Office's efforts, both operationally and in terms of the legal foundations and essence of its mandate. In late 2023, its operations in the coastal countries had begun to report cases of refoulement, a trend uncharacteristic of a region where borders had always remained open. While Governments remained committed to their obligations towards displaced persons and legal frameworks were in place, there were many security concerns. The Office was working with Government security and stabilization officials to maintain a balance between legitimate security concerns and the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

36. He did not want to leave the Standing Committee with a picture that did not do justice to the opportunities available. Transforming the way that UNHCR operated was not only a necessity but the soundest way to achieve optimal outcomes. The Office was optimistic about its efforts to foster inclusion. Its work with local actors had fostered complementary collaboration, enhanced knowledge exchange, deepened understanding of communities, increased access and, in short, had ensured a sustainable presence. Now more than ever, it was crucial to demonstrate to donors the added value of the Office's work and he hoped that the challenging funding situation and substantial needs on the ground had underscored the urgency of supporting its operations in the region.

37. The representative of **Portugal** acknowledged the complex region-wide challenges presented by forced displacement, recognized the Office's vital role in the protection of refugees and highlighted Portugal's financial contributions to that work. She urged UNHCR to continue to document and report on the deteriorating situation of forcibly displaced persons in the Sahel region.

38. The crisis in the Sudan and its regional impact were concerning and the provision of assistance should be expedited. The humanitarian situation in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province was also a source of concern, particularly as many of the humanitarian programmes in the region were underfunded. The international community's security, stabilization and humanitarian relief efforts were crucial. In light of the rise of non-State armed groups and the long-lasting impact of cyclones Idai and Kenneth, she welcomed the Government's increased efforts to uphold international humanitarian law and called on the international community and UNHCR to support Mozambique in that humanitarian crisis.

39. The representative of **Nigeria** said she recognized the many challenges that UNHCR and its staff faced in high-risk operations and joined the Office in mourning the loss of humanitarian workers worldwide. Of the 14,300,000 forcibly displaced and stateless persons in West and Central Africa, over 3 million were in Nigeria. While those numbers could largely be attributed to conflict and insecurity, climate-change-related challenges continued to rise. She urged UNHCR to enhance its efforts to find the durable solutions that were critical to peacebuilding in conflict situations.

40. As stated in the conference room paper, conflicts and inequitable access to socioeconomic resources had prompted new displacements in the Lake Chad Basin, further exacerbated by the impact of climate change on livelihoods that had led to food insecurity in parts of Nigeria. She welcomed the Office's ongoing efforts to focus its activities in 2024 on enhancing self-reliance and access to critical means of livelihood from the onset of emergencies and noted the ongoing cooperation between UNHCR and the Office of the Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Solutions to Internal Displacement. As one of the 15 Member State beneficiaries of the laudable "solution-pathways initiative", Nigeria was committed to providing sustained solutions to internally displaced persons in the country.

41. In view of the over 13,000 schools that had been forcibly closed due to prevailing insecurity in West and Central Africa in 2023, her Government applauded the prioritization of programmes that strengthened child protection and the Office's partnerships with other development actors in order to facilitate the inclusion of refugee children in tailored programmes. It particularly welcomed the collaboration with ProFuturo in providing access to digital learning and enhanced educational opportunities for displaced children and called on Member States to consider endorsing the intergovernmental Safe Schools Declaration and, in particular, to follow the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use During Armed Conflict.

42. She welcomed the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which addressed the issue of mixed movements, and the initiative to deploy technology to address climate and environmental challenges through a climate-smart water management programme in her country. Updates on that programme and additional information on the Office's contingency plans for Nigeria would be appreciated.

43. The representative of **Switzerland** expressed concern at the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Sahel as seen from the increase in forced displacement in the region. His Government therefore welcomed the progress made by some countries in strengthening their legal frameworks for asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless or internally displaced persons. He would welcome additional information on Project 21, an inter-agency initiative aimed at the harmonization of data collection and analysis, and particularly on the Office's collaboration with regional protection clusters.

44. In light of the insufficient funding for gender-based violence prevention and response, he requested information on the prospects for 2024, how UNHCR planned to systematize its collaboration with local women's associations in the region and in what way its approach was transformative. He requested more information about the Office's collaboration with the private sector and the results achieved.

45. The Global Refugee Forum 2023 had focused on the need to increase the autonomy of displaced and stateless persons and to seek durable solutions. He would appreciate details on UNHCR cooperation with the private sector and the results achieved to date. Furthermore, since internally displaced persons accounted for 85 per cent of all displaced persons in the Sahel region, he wondered what role the Office was playing in the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, particularly in the pilot countries (the Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria).

46. The representative of the **United States of America** said that she welcomed the Office's leadership in Chad and the Central African Republic, where it had rapidly scaled up operations to provide life-saving services and protection for more than a million Sudanese refugees and had relocated over 250,000 of them from the insecure border to new and existing camps. In 2024, Chad was likely to receive an additional 250,000 refugees from the Sudan, further straining an already-challenging humanitarian response.

47. On the Sahel situation, she expressed concern that host Governments' restrictions on humanitarian operations and increased attacks against humanitarian workers were preventing lifesaving support from reaching millions of people. The Central African Republic remained one of the most dangerous countries for humanitarians and many of the Office's partners were unable to provide services. She was also concerned that the percentage of women without access to services to prevent and to respond to gender-based violence in the region had increased between 2022 and 2023. She welcomed the Office's commitment to continue its efforts to prevent such violence, including through pilot projects involving men.

48. Insecurity in the Sahel region continued to place pressure on coastal West African States, which currently hosted over 100,000 refugees from Burkina Faso and Mali. Her Government therefore welcomed the Office's decision to open a Multi-Country Office in Abidjan and applauded Côte d'Ivoire for adopting its first national law on asylum, which allowed refugees and asylum-seekers to use biometric identity cards as residence permits. She was encouraged by the Office's progress towards durable solutions, including the voluntary repatriation of Cameroonians from Chad; noted the launch of the Central African Republic Solutions Support Platform; and welcomed the Office's advocacy for local solutions such as Senegal's pledge to naturalize 9,000 Mauritians and progress towards a tripartite legal framework for voluntary repatriation in the Lake Chad region.

49. She encouraged the Office to provide sustainable assistance to mitigate climate-induced displacement in the region, welcomed its ongoing efforts to conduct initial environmental impact studies before establishing settlements, appreciated its commitment to implementing a new regional climate action strategy to protect forcibly displaced persons in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and Niger, and encouraged close coordination with host Governments, affected populations, and other donors.

50. Her Government welcomed the Office's efforts to strengthen relief and development coherence and supported regional expansion of the World Bank's Window for Host Communities and Refugees in Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger. She noted the Office's enhanced collaboration with the private sector and international financial institutions in order to improve social cohesion, access to education, livelihoods and infrastructure. In light of the decline in donor contributions, such creative solutions were paramount. In closing, she commended host countries throughout West and Central Africa for their hospitality and cooperation with UNHCR, other humanitarian partners, and donors.

51. The representative of **Austria** said that in 2023, her Government had supported UNHCR operations in Africa with a total of €6 million and that eight of the twenty pledges that it had announced at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 concerned projects in African countries. The humanitarian crisis in the Sudan had been exacerbated by the civil war and critical infrastructures, especially the health system, had been severely affected. Some 6.1 million people had been internally displaced, over 1.5 million had fled to neighbouring countries and the Sudan faced the world's largest child displacement crisis. Women and children were particularly exposed to the dangers of fighting and to sexual and gender-based violence.

52. He encouraged the Ethiopian Government to continue its implementation of the peace agreement with Tigray, which provided for the demobilization and disarmament of combatants and the investigation of serious human rights violations, and to escalate efforts to peacefully resolve the conflicts in Amhara and Oromia. His Government was concerned that Mozambique was one of the countries most affected by natural disasters worldwide and that the north of the country, and particularly Cabo Delgado province, had experienced years of recurring terrorist attacks.

53. The overall decrease in stability, security and safety in the Sahel region had led to an increase in humanitarian needs, human rights violations and violence against the civilian population. The situations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were volatile and regaining political stability, combating terrorism and creating prospects for the population were key priorities for those countries. Austria

welcomed the Office's prioritization of the protection of women and girls, including those impacted by sexual and gender-based violence, and its provision of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. He commended it for taking age, gender and diversity into account in its programming and increasing its engagement with women-led organizations.

54. His Government was pleased that UNHCR would continue to strengthen and expand opportunities for the inclusion of refugee, asylum-seekers and returnee children in national education systems; support education in emergency settings; strengthen access to primary health care; respond to epidemics; and support national health systems. He requested more information about the Office's efforts to address the specific protection and assistance needs of persons of concern with disabilities.

55. Lastly, he welcomed the adoption of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa at the recent African Union Summit, as well as São Tomé and Príncipe's accession to the two United Nations conventions on statelessness.

56. The representative of the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** said that his Government was increasingly concerned about the rise in displacement in recent years. It welcomed the efforts by UNHCR and others to build a better understanding of the protection crisis through improved data and evidence collection and had contributed support to that endeavour through Project 21. He urged the Office to ensure that safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse were prioritized appropriately.

57. He called on the international community to collectively emphasize the imperative to safeguard the lives and well-being of civilians and displaced individuals in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was essential to scale up the protection cluster and promote access to additional land as the country's camps were overpopulated and the existing new land allocation was insufficient.

58. The representative of the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)** commended the Office's commitment to stay and deliver life-saving assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad basin in a complex and volatile setting. She was concerned by the dire humanitarian situation and its effects on neighbouring countries. The OIC was dispatching support through its Regional Mission in Niger and, with financial support from the financial institutions and Governments of its member States, had implemented many projects across the triple nexus in several sectors, including education, water and women's empowerment.

59. The OIC had recently conducted several field visits to assess the humanitarian needs of refugees, internally displaced persons and other vulnerable populations and was planning to hold a donor conference for the Sahel and the Lake Chad countries, to which both UNHCR and international Governments and institutions would be invited, in April 2024. Durable and proactive solutions were urgently needed. It was important to address the root causes of the crisis, prevent its escalation and the emergence of new catastrophes, and scale up coordinated programming.

60. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for West and Central Africa** (UNHCR) said that he was reassured by the meeting's focus on the situation in the Sudan and its effects on Chad and the Central African Republic. The humanitarian community should provide investment resources and financial support for refugees and internally displaced persons through the latter country's Solutions Support Platform.

61. He thanked the Government of Chad for welcoming over 1.1 million refugees in a fragile environment and emphasized the collective responsibility of development and humanitarian stakeholders to facilitate development activities in the fragile eastern part of the country. The High Commissioner had visited Chad in September 2023 with the World Bank and another visit was planned for 2024. Sustained efforts to maintain protection in the Sahel and Chad Basin were needed. In light of the dwindling resources, a community-centred approach would be key. Nationalizing UNHCR positions and recruiting its staff from local communities allowed the office to continue its efforts.

62. Climate change was an exacerbating factor in population movement. The Regional Bureau was taking action to safeguard the protection environment. He recognized the access challenges in the Sahel and stressed that engagement approaches must be adjusted to the needs of communities.

63. He thanked the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for its support for Project 21, which was a way of maximizing the engagement of the protection portfolio and had helped the humanitarian community to come together in collecting and using data on the occurrence of violations in considering how to address and monitor them. In response to the comments by Member States on protection in Chad, gender-based violence, disabilities and the route-based approach, he said that although UNHCR was addressing those issues, they were difficult to isolate in terms of programming and basic needs such as water and shelter. In Nigeria, the Office was cooperating in implementation of the protection mandate that featured prominently in the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement and in Togo, in the face of financial challenges, it had implemented a community-level response to gender-based violence in close collaboration with women-led organizations.

64. Concerning private sector engagement, a workshop with selected countries and the Africa Finance Corporation would soon be held in Dakar to consider ways of sustaining the self-reliance capacity of some displaced persons.

iv. Americas

65. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas** (UNHCR) said that the region was facing an unprecedented displacement crisis. Recent years had seen a significant increase in mixed movements toward the north of the continent as a result of fragile economies, increased insecurity and violence. Climate change and frequent emergencies caused by El Niño had affected many countries and mixed movements of people along dangerous routes created serious protection problems, particularly for women and children.

66. UNHCR was collaborating with States and other relevant stakeholders in the development of a comprehensive strategy that would take a holistic approach covering all phases of displacement. The region was pioneering implementation of the route-based approach with a focus on four main axes, the first of which was ensuring protection during all phases of displacement. The Office was supporting national efforts to strengthen asylum systems and promote the regulation of legal stay processes. Addressing the structural causes of displacement required a focus on protection systems in countries of origin. It was therefore a priority to support the development of legal frameworks and the institutions charged with the care and inclusion of displaced populations. In Haiti, for example, protecting people affected by violence was a priority for the entire international community.

67. The second axis was the stability of displaced persons in host communities. Because many of the successive and pendulum movements observed in the region were a result of lack of income or barriers to accessing services, UNHCR and its partners were promoting social inclusion policies and job placement programmes. Support from financial institutions was essential to some of those initiatives and the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) had invested over \$5 billion in concessional loans to support regularization campaigns and social inclusion in host communities.

68. The third axis was responsibility-sharing and collaboration. The Americas had seen an exponential growth of resettlement programmes and admission pathways. In the context of mixed movements, those programmes played an essential role by providing access to international protection and mitigating trafficking and smuggling risks. The number of individual resettlement cases in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Spain and the United States of America processed by the Office in 2024 was expected to more than triple that of 2023. UNHCR and IOM were supporting the implementation of safe mobility offices, but increased processing capacity and the wider use of more flexible criteria were essential to the effectiveness of that mechanism. He stressed the importance of humanitarian visas for people with specific protection needs and drew attention to related programmes launched in Argentina, Brazil and the United States of America.

69. The fourth axis was the strengthening of a coordinated humanitarian response. The route-based approach could facilitate the identification and referral of people with special protection needs and the provision of support for local services in communities of transit and destination, particularly in border areas. In view of the protection challenges of the current mobility crisis, it was urgent to

expand existing coordination mechanisms, strengthen information-sharing and enhance early warning systems.

70. UNHCR participated in and provided technical assistance to States within the framework of various forums and addressed migration protection and governance issues through complementary approaches. A Santiago declaration and plan of action might be adopted in 2024. The Cartagena+40 process led by Chile in commemoration of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees provided a unique opportunity to consolidate existing initiatives and design a regional roadmap for the implementation in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Global Compact on Refugees and of commitments made during the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

71. The representative of **Uruguay**, speaking on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC), expressed her appreciation for the efforts of countries in the region to meet the needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless or internally displaced persons. In light of the growing number of persons seeking alternative routes in the Americas, GRULAC called on the members of the Executive Committee to acknowledge and address the root causes of refugee movements.

72. She welcomed the Office's comprehensive route-based approach and urged it to allocate funding commensurate with the high level of protection offered in the region while continuing to foster cooperation with all stakeholders in the search for durable solutions leading to the socioeconomic inclusion and meaningful participation of displaced persons. She called on Member States in a position to do so to support the work of UNHCR by making timely, flexible, unconditional and unearmarked contributions in a spirit of solidarity and to refrain from putting obstacles in the way of international cooperation in that regard.

73. The Latin American and Caribbean countries were committed to protecting the rights of refugees and displaced persons. They accounted for 21 per cent of the pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and were deeply involved in the Cartagena+40 process. Reaffirming her Group's commitment to regional cooperation and the strengthening of protection and assistance to target populations in the Americas, she called for greater collaboration between Member States and UNHCR in meeting the challenges posed by forced displacement through a holistic approach.

74. The representative of the **European Union** said that the European Union and its member States shared the Office's concern about the increase in forced displacement in the Americas. They had worked alongside UNHCR to raise the visibility of the Venezuelan crisis, including through the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities held in March 2023. She commended Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Peru for setting up temporary protection mechanisms and UNHCR for its continued presence in the most critical areas of the country.

75. She welcomed the launch of the Cartagena+40 process and urged UNHCR to prioritize protection, continue to coordinate with the relevant organizations and humanitarian actors on matters such as cooperation with local partners and deportation risks, and better synchronize the regional refugee response plans implemented in cooperation with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with the humanitarian response plans led by OCHA at the national level. In view of the increase in mixed migration flows, especially through dangerous routes such as the Darién Gap, the current regional coordination platform should be adapted to the evolving circumstances and should include refugees and migrants of all nationalities.

76. The European Union fully supported the peace process in Colombia and the efforts to implement the 2016 Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace. In line with the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, it was essential to identify durable solutions for internally displaced persons. UNHCR was to be commended for its coordination of the joint response to mixed movements from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the region and for its integration of vulnerable communities into its programmes. In its advocacy and protection efforts, the Office should focus on persons in vulnerable situations who were not eligible for Temporary Protected status.

77. She appreciated the work carried out under the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS) and its Support Platform, including the holistic approach to forced displacement. The European Union welcomed the Panama City Declaration and roadmap and would continue to support Belize as the President Pro Tempore of MIRPS.

78. The representative of **Mexico** said that migration was a social issue that required a rights-based approach with shared responsibility and cooperation between countries of origin, transit, destination and return. Mexico had the third highest number of asylum requests in the world – over 399,000 in 2021 – and a recognition rate of 70 per cent. In recent years, over half of those requests had come from women and children.

79. It was vital to implement protection and integration measures and to address the root causes of migration. With that in mind, the countries present at the Palenque Summit on migration, which her Government had hosted, had undertaken to develop an action plan to strengthen self-sufficiency and food sovereignty in the region; ensure the protection, conservation and restoration of the environment; and promote employment, education and the development of technical and technological skills. The participants had stressed the importance of implementing comprehensive policies that respected human life, dignity and integrity and of promoting permanent regularization and the expansion of labour mobility pathways.

80. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, her Government had supported the establishment of a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism to ensure the meaningful, representative and inclusive participation of refugees and asylum-seekers in decision-making with a view to their empowerment and full enjoyment of their rights. It also stood ready to support the Government of Chile in its leadership of the Cartagena+40 process.

81. Within the framework of MIRPS, Mexico had undertaken to strengthen the national institutions responsible for granting refugee status by improving their technical capacities and national procedures, systems and practices. In that connection, she welcomed the Office's support for the coordination of regional strategies, strengthening of asylum capacities, development and application of digital tools, provision of coordinated responses to internal displacement and development of initiatives for the socioeconomic inclusion of persons of concern.

82. The representative of **Brazil** thanked UNHCR for recognizing her country's consistent efforts to welcome and integrate refugees and vulnerable groups. Since 2017, Brazil had been implementing a generous and open humanitarian visa policy that offered protection to those fleeing institutional instability, armed conflict, natural disasters and serious human rights violations. Its digital platform, SISCONARE, had streamlined the asylum process and significantly reduced the backlog of applications. Her Government was particularly concerned about the deterioration of security conditions in Haiti, which put extremely vulnerable groups at risk of displacement. In response, it had created specific legal pathways for Haitian nationals, such as temporary visas for family reunification, which had benefited over 120,000 people.

83. She welcomed the Office's strategy of promoting third country solutions in the Americas. In that connection, her Government was resuming its resettlement programme with the aim of resettling 1,200 refugees over the coming four years, including through community sponsorship, and would engage with civil society to design comprehensive solutions for refugees and migrants with a focus on local integration. She commended UNHCR on the success of the Global Refugee Forum 2023, at which Brazil had joined several multi-stakeholder pledges, including the pledge on family reunification, and had made six ambitious national commitments. On the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, her Government had presented the final report on the implementation of its plan of action, and it remained fully committed to the next stage of the process under the leadership of Chile.

84. Acknowledging the Office's efforts to respond to the growing humanitarian needs in the Americas, she noted with regret that budgetary allocations had not increased in proportion to those needs; only 11 per cent of the region's 2023 financial requirements had been fully funded as at 31 January 2024. It was imperative to match the high level of protection offered by the region with adequate resources. While the conference room paper called for greater access to legal pathways to protection, she wondered what other areas should be prioritized by countries in the Americas in 2024 and what measures the Office planned to adopt in order to increase funding in light of the growing needs.

85. The representative of **Spain** said that protection of the over 20 million refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced or stateless persons in the Americas would not have been possible without the work of UNHCR and other United Nations entities and, above all, the generosity of host countries.

86. Her Government welcomed the Cartagena+40 process as a unique opportunity for coordination. It appreciated the inclusive nature of the planned consultations and themes and pledged its full support for those initiatives. Spain had contributed significant funding for the period 2020–2024 to the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela. It supported the Total Peace initiative in Colombia and was providing multisectoral support to victims of violence in that country and to vulnerable groups such as Afro-Colombian women and girls.

87. She was concerned at the increase in mixed migration flows through the Darién Gap and stressed the importance of a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach with a focus on gender and human rights. Spain continued to support the humanitarian operations being carried out on the ground and the national response plans for managing migration flows and promoting inclusion policies through the MIRPS Support Platform. She commended Panama for the work carried out under its presidency of MIRPS and welcomed Belize as the new President pro tempore.

88. Her Government had adopted a range of creative, adaptive policies that took into account the mixed nature of migration flows in order to ensure safe mobility and opportunities for regular migration in the Americas. It had initiated an innovative pilot project for Nicaraguan refugees hosted in Costa Rica, from which a significant number of people were expected to benefit, and was continuing to expand its circular migration programme to more sectors and countries.

89. The representative of **Greece** noted with regret that the Americas continued to face extremely high levels of displacement and mixed migration flows. Concerned at the considerable increase in irregular movement in the Darién Gap, he stressed the need to reinforce legal pathways to protection and to support the efforts made by individual Member States or at the regional level. In that connection, he commended several initiatives by States in the region, which included humanitarian visas, temporary protection regimes and regularization programmes.

90. Legal pathways were an effective tool for combating human trafficking networks as they allowed people to choose legal migration and avoid dangerous journeys. His Government was endeavouring to promote legal migration through pathways such as bilateral labour agreements and the regularization of third-country nationals and was considering joining the Safe Mobility initiative led by the United States.

91. The representative of **Ecuador** said that the unprecedented levels of displacement and mixed migration flows in the Americas and the growing number of persons of concern to UNHCR were alarming. The increase in irregular movement in the region, including through the Darién Gap, was particularly worrying, as was the persistently high number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region. He stressed the importance of considering the root causes of those displacements, which included poverty, lack of opportunities, conflicts, violence, natural disasters and the effects of climate change. His Government therefore welcomed the Office's comprehensive approach, which took into account the entire displacement cycle and focused on strengthening access to assistance and other forms of international protection, and appreciated its support for burden- and responsibility-sharing agreements as a tool for improving the situation of displaced persons and strengthening the capacities of host States and communities.

92. He commended Chile on its leadership of the Quito Process and welcomed Costa Rica to the presidency. His Government acknowledged the countries in the region that had put in place legal stay arrangements and regularization processes that were available to Venezuelan nationals and persons of concern to UNHCR. For its part, Ecuador endeavoured to ensure the effective protection and economic inclusion of displaced persons as demonstrated by its successful regularization process.

93. The Global Refugee Forum 2023 had demonstrated the clear commitment of many countries, organizations and other relevant stakeholders to finding pragmatic solutions to the needs of displaced persons. His Government had made several pledges aimed at strengthening the international protection of displaced persons and had joined calls for the adoption of a new declaration and plan of action under the Cartagena+40 process.

94. His Government encouraged all Member States and other relevant stakeholders, as a matter of urgency, to increase their efforts to find innovative, inclusive, creative, constructive and multidimensional solutions with a view to addressing appropriately and effectively the national,

regional and global challenges to the protection of refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons, and other persons of concern to UNHCR.

95. The representative of **Switzerland**, noting the worrying rise in the number of displaced persons in the region, said that he would be interested to know what the Office's predictions were for 2024 and beyond. The situation in the Americas was complex and characterised by mixed migration flows. He therefore welcomed the coordinated, holistic and multi-stakeholder approach adopted by MIRPS and the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, although the latter should take the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela into greater consideration. His Government supported the creation of conditions that would enable displaced Venezuelans to return to their country and called on the Office and its partners to pursue that objective within the framework of an intersectoral action plan.

96. He commended UNHCR for its work in the region; its integrated, route-based approach; and its support for Governments' efforts to create favourable protection environments. It would be helpful to have an overview of the Office's regional involvement in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Cooperation with civil society at the local level in the search for effective and durable solutions was crucial. His Government was interested in the Office's work with women-led organizations and wondered what lessons had been learned in that area, especially following the regional workshop held in Panama in 2023.

97. In the face of increasing forced displacement in the region, it was essential to focus on prevention. Switzerland was engaging with the Government of Colombia on the national peace process and had contributed to the multi-stakeholder pledge on peacebuilding and conflict prevention. He commended Colombia and Egypt on their leadership of that pledge and urged all interested stakeholders to join it.

98. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that her country continued to welcome refugees and to support the protection and well-being of all persons present in its territory. It was therefore concerning that the term "refugee" was being used to describe Venezuelans who were migrating for economic reasons as a result of the measures applied to their country by various other States, giving the impression that it was persecuting its own citizens. Her Government had been excluded from both the Quito Process and the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, which had published questionable statistics on Venezuelan refugees and received funding from donors that were endeavouring to undermine its leadership, and reiterated its call for international dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect.

99. The Cartagena+40 process would be tested by its ability to address all countries in the region. It was essential to consider how new initiatives might effectively address the impact of natural disasters and economic challenges. It would also be necessary to critically analyse the opportunities and risks arising from the implementation of initiatives under the Cartagena+40 process and to adopt a holistic approach that addressed the multiple structural barriers to integration faced by refugees and asylum-seekers.

100. UNHCR initiatives to ensure the return of Venezuelan citizens required continuous coordination with the Venezuelan authorities, as well as the support of the international community, to ensure that returnees received the necessary assistance with their economic and social reintegration. Her Government had called repeatedly for international support for its Secure Homeland Plan, which, despite the Plan's success to date, had gone unanswered.

101. In closing, she called on the international community to reject other States' efforts to impose illegal, unilateral and coercive measures on her country, in violation of international law, in order to obstruct its economic development.

102. The representative of **Portugal** said that her Government welcomed the launch of the Cartagena+40 process, which would produce a common roadmap for protection in the region and for implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees. In that context, Portugal had joined Brazil in leading the multi-stakeholder pledge on supporting refugee family reunification.

103. She commended UNHCR on its efforts to promote the inclusion of refugees in the national education systems of several countries in the region and on the regional agreements signed with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with a view to the development of joint gender-

transformative action plans. Brazil, Colombia and Peru were also to be commended on their efforts to tackle statelessness, which would serve as an example to other countries.

104. Her Government remained concerned about the Venezuelan refugee crisis and, as at 31 December 2023, had contributed €100,000 to the OCHA Venezuela Humanitarian Fund and €100,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) actions and response in the country. It commended UNHCR on its efforts in that area, including at the International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants and their Host Countries and Communities, and thanked the countries that had put in place legal stay arrangements and temporary protection processes to regularize the status of Venezuelans.

105. The representative of **Canada** said that she was deeply concerned about the humanitarian and protection needs of the increasing numbers of refugees and other persons of concern in the Americas, especially in the context of complex mixed migration. Canada was involved in a number of multilateral and regional forums and targeted capacity-building initiatives with the goal of promoting access to protection and safe, regular and orderly migration.

106. In line with its commitment to developing durable solutions, her Government had expanded its traditional resettlement programmes and implemented innovative initiatives such as complementary pathways, labour mobility and community sponsorship. For example, it had recently announced an initiative to grant permanent residence to 11,000 Colombian, Haitian and Venezuelan nationals with family ties to Canada. In that connection, it was actively engaging with its partners to promote its Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot, through which skilled refugees and other displaced persons could secure permanent work opportunities in Canada.

107. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, her Government had reaffirmed its support for numerous regional engagement and capacity-building efforts in the Americas. It was also exploring ways to build on the success of the ongoing Regional Asylum Capacity-Building Initiative by setting up similar initiatives in Central America. Canada remained engaged with the MIRPS Support Platform and was leading the Committee on asylum under the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection in support of efforts to address the needs of forcibly displaced persons in the region.

108. The representative of the **United States of America** said that his country welcomed the Office's continued efforts to strengthen access to protection and solutions for vulnerable people in the Americas, including the 7 million displaced Venezuelans in the region. It was imperative to support and stabilize those people and their host communities. He applauded the generosity of host countries in the region, including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, and their efforts to grant legal status that enabled displaced persons and vulnerable migrants to rebuild their lives. His Government encouraged other countries with the necessary capacity, both within and beyond the Americas, to adopt similar programmes.

109. In addressing the unprecedented levels of irregular migration and forced displacement in the region, a collaborative strategy and cooperative approach were required. As part of its commitment under the Los Angeles Declaration, the United States had significantly expanded its programmes aimed at addressing the root causes of migration and improving access to legal migration pathways. One such initiative was the Safe Mobility Offices which, with the support of UNHCR, had been established in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Guatemala to ensure that refugees and vulnerable migrants did not have to undertake dangerous journeys in search of safety and opportunities. Those Offices complemented the wide range of existing services for refugees and migrants in host countries while increasing access to information about lawful migration pathways to Canada and Spain.

110. His Government remained deeply concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in Haiti. It welcomed the Office's enhanced presence in the country and its efforts to strengthen protection systems there and encouraged UNHCR to continue to prioritize efforts to end statelessness and support those at risk in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the region. In the face of such complex challenges, the United States of America remained committed to continuing its strong partnership with the Office and countries in the region to provide protection, support and durable solutions to those in greatest need.

111. The representative of **Japan** said that his Government had decided to implement new projects totalling \$9.1 million to assist Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru with the reception of displaced persons from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, it had pledged support for agriculture and community development as a contribution to peacebuilding in

Colombia and would cooperate with the multi-stakeholder peacebuilding pledge led by the Colombian Government. In the context of the mixed migration of internally displaced persons, refugees and displaced persons, it was important for the Office to work more closely with IOM and development agencies.

112. Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs had visited Panama in February 2024 and had announced a new Diplomatic Initiative toward Latin America and the Caribbean, under which it had begun to work with Latin American and Caribbean countries to address the problems that they faced and increase human dignity in the region. In particular, the Initiative would promote the concept of women, peace and security in migration issues and provide gender-sensitive protection services to 20,000 migrant women in Costa Rica, Honduras and Panama.

113. The representative of **Germany** commended the efforts of the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela to harmonize humanitarian response and urged UNHCR and others to expand their coordination efforts in a region that was increasingly facing mixed migration movements. He applauded the efforts of host countries and communities in the Americas, which could serve as a role model for the inclusion of displaced populations.

114. There was a pressing need for further mobilization of non-traditional donors, regional partners and the private sector in addressing the escalating humanitarian and protection needs in the region. He commended the leading role played by the Governments of countries in the Americas at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and their strong commitment to multi-stakeholder pledges on peace and combating gender-based violence.

115. The representative of **El Salvador** conveyed his Government's appreciation for the Office's efforts at the regional level and, in particular, for its support for his country's efforts to support refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons. Recognizing the huge scale of human displacement in the region, he joined the call for increased efforts to tackle displacement-related challenges, protect the human rights of displaced persons and provide additional humanitarian assistance in a spirit of international solidarity. He paid tribute to the contributions of international organizations and other stakeholders at the national and regional levels and urged UNHCR, through its Regional Office, to provide additional funding to meet the needs of the region.

116. His Government's policy on displacement embodied its intention to provide comprehensive care to Salvadorans abroad and displaced persons within the country in a manner consistent with the commitments made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and in the Global Compact on Refugees. Under the MIRPS Framework and with the Office's assistance, El Salvador had made significant progress through a holistic approach to the adoption of legal frameworks and the implementation of public policies benefitting refugees, displaced persons and those at risk of internal displacement. It had encouraged durable solutions and provided legal and humanitarian assistance to people in need of protection.

117. His Government was focusing on four priority areas: protection, education, health and employment, and livelihoods. It had provided training on international protection to the representatives of various institutions and was collecting data on forced internal displacement over the past decade. It had also adopted a protocol on the comprehensive care of asylum-seekers and refugees and had provided information on international protection to El Salvador's consular representations. Its "My Job" programme had provided employment opportunities to 616 people. His Government offered flexible education mechanisms for persons at risk of displacement and had expanded its psychological treatment services for displaced persons.

118. The representative of **Guatemala** (observer), noting the unprecedented levels of displacement and mixed movements, stressed the need for coordinated international cooperation in the delivery of sustained humanitarian response. That need was particularly acute for Guatemala as a country of origin, transit and destination. During his recent visit to Geneva, the President of Guatemala, Bernardo Arevalo, had met with the High Commissioner to discuss issues relating to refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced persons and had expressed his appreciation for UNHCR as a strategic partner. His Government's wider partnerships with local Governments, governmental institutions and other stakeholders had helped it to introduce good practices that gave individuals access to protection irrespective of their nationality or migration status.

119. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Guatemala had made commitments aimed at reducing pressure on host countries and promoting the self-sufficiency of refugees and host communities. Ongoing cooperation under the MIRPS framework in the search for comprehensive, durable solutions and improvement of the services provided to local economies was essential. His Government had undertaken to support regional and hemispheric efforts under the Los Angeles Declaration and would soon hold a ministerial meeting on regional cooperation on migration and protection issues. Lastly, Guatemala hoped to become a full member of the Office's Executive Committee in the near future.

120. The representative of **Colombia** commended UNHCR on its cooperation with his country's Ministry for Foreign Affairs in developing online platforms and facilitating the more rapid processing of refugee applications. Its Government appreciated the recognition of its peace-building efforts in the Office's reports and hoped that lasting solutions would be possible through continued international efforts.

121. Colombia had made a number of commitments at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, particularly with regard to conflict prevention and inclusion, and supported the adoption of a new action plan to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cartagena Declaration. With the situation in the Darién Gap spiralling out of control, it would be useful to hear more about the assistance that the Office and its partners were planning to provide.

122. The representative of **Save the Children**, speaking on behalf of a group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), recalled the unprecedented displacement situation in the Americas, the interruption of protection pathways, rising insecurity and soaring discrimination. Visa restrictions and other dangers faced by displaced persons were forcing over half a million people to travel through the perilous Darién Gap and there was a 6-month waiting period for asylum application appointments.

123. Compounding that issue was the lack of cooperation between States in addressing the underreporting of deaths and disappearances along land migration routes and in border areas. In addition, a lack of pathways towards employment in several countries of the region was driving many Venezuelans towards the United States of America. Internal displacement was being triggered by humanitarian crises, most notably in Colombia, Haiti and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and required greater support from UNHCR.

124. The NGOs that she represented were deeply concerned at the attempts to reduce funding for humanitarian response and arbitrary cuts influenced by donor priorities. Emphasizing the significance of the 40th Anniversary of the adoption of the Cartagena Declaration, she called for the development of a new 10-year regional action plan that addressed climate-related displacement and provided for collaboration and funding in support of humanitarian efforts.

125. The **Director of the Regional Bureau for the Americas** (UNHCR) commended the countries in the Americas for hosting displaced persons and for their commitment to seeking solutions. The Cartagena Declaration was an example of a platform built on successful relationships between countries with common goals, underpinned by an inclusive process of cooperation and practice-sharing between Governments and partnerships with financial institutions, civil society organizations and academics. Noting that almost half of the 350 pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 had been made by NGOs, he emphasised that the next 10-year strategy should include all stakeholders.

126. With respect to the protection of asylum-seekers in Mexico, the only viable solution was to modernize or decentralize asylum systems in cooperation with other countries, which had provided technical support and assistance in the past. As asylum-seekers accounted for a significant proportion of the world's population requiring international protection, efforts to legalize their status were essential. The assistance that the Office provided to displaced Venezuelans was perfectly consistent with its approach to mixed movements and had needs-based and legal response at its core. However, decisions concerning refugee status recognition processes could be taken only by host governments.

127. Measures taken by several countries in the region had been identified as solutions to the concerns about regular migration pathways raised by the representative of Mexico. The expansion of the United States of America's resettlement programme was a good starting point, but the Safe Mobility Offices should receive greater support and the criteria for accessing their services should

be reviewed with a view to increasing the number of potential beneficiaries. Canada's labour mobility scheme and Spain's circular migration programme were examples of additional programmes that could expand the scope of legal pathways for displaced persons in mixed movements. In that connection, he called for wider family reunification programmes across the region.

128. He fully agreed with the comments on coordinated humanitarian response and was grateful for the expressions of support for the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela; local participation was vital to its success with 70 per cent of its membership made up of local organizations. The main challenge going forward would be to cover all nationalities under the Platform's umbrella, expanding it beyond Latin America to provide humanitarian assistance, protection and counselling to other people involved in mixed movements.

129. Proposals for the coordination of assistance within and outside the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela included strengthening integration, delivering support to border communities and developing programmes for the integration of returnees, and providing assistance in a number of other areas such as documentation, education and health. UNHCR stood ready to continue to cooperate with its partners on a coordinated response, including in countries of transit and destination.

130. While the Darién Gap was one of the targeted areas of support for land-based migration in the region with an increased humanitarian presence, it should not be viewed in isolation. Addressing that situation would require bringing stability to countries of transit and origin in the region and mitigating the risks faced by people on the move. The Office was working closely with IOM and other agencies in Colombia, Costa Rica and other countries along that migration route to identify and refer cases with protection needs to humanitarian assistance providers.

131. With regard to sexual and gender-based violence, the Office's integrated gender policy sought to gain a better understanding of the dangers faced by at-risk groups during land-based migration. A study by the organization HIAS titled "Our right to safety: Placing forcibly displaced women at the center of searching solutions to address gender-based violence", identified specific risks, particularly to women in mixed movements. A strengthened response was needed, particularly when movements involved women and children. He recalled that UNHCR had signed agreements with UNFPA and UN Women and, in cooperation with women-led organizations, was collaborating with IOM in organizing its response. The Office was also focussing on national policies for the inclusion of displaced women in protection programmes for women and children in countries along land migration routes and was working to raise the profile of those organizations at the regional level.

132. Turning to the issue of the Office's finances, he explained that it tried to prioritize its activities with a view to trimming administrative costs without affecting final deliverables. The strategy implemented in the Americas would facilitate a transition to a solutions-oriented approach that would help to integrate displaced persons and empower them to reduce their reliance on humanitarian assistance. To that end, it would be necessary to increase the visibility of the various crises in Latin America and to mobilize additional funding. Further investment was needed so that the Office could offer legal solutions, assist with socioeconomic integration and provide humanitarian support with the broader goal of bringing stability to countries of origin and transit and consolidating the region's various legal integration programmes. He would therefore welcome the establishment of a "friends of the Cartagena Process" group that would bring together countries of the region, cooperating States and financial institutions.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.