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

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Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.01 p.m.

Dr. Katharina Stasch (Germany), Chairperson, chaired the discussion.

4. Management, financial control, administrative oversight and human resources

1. **The Inspector General**, providing an oral update on his Office's work, said that he wished to supplement his update paper with some qualitative comments and key observations. On reflecting on 2023, he continued to believe in the crucial and powerful role that independent oversight, whether on integrity or assurance, and disproportionate to their size, had to help organizations improve. His Office's strategy was to make the UNHCR oversight system efficient and effective in order to give stakeholders, particularly the people it served, confidence that UNHCR acts with integrity and makes the very best use of the resources entrusted to it to achieve the most impact.

2. His Office's mandate was to ensure that the oversight system was greater than the sum of its specific and independent parts. In the run-up to the concluding phase of the Inspector General Office's Strategy from 2021 to 2026, he was pleased to confirm that both sides of the oversight system, integrity and assurance, were working well and with legitimate and healthy dynamic tensions collectively. His Office continued to support improvements and best practices on oversight in 2023 with a range of direct work and facilitated projects, including for example, to improve the handling of protection against retaliation processes, in concert with the Ethics Office, and to review the provision of the SpeakUp! Helpline and a qualitative longitudinal review of his Office's data on sexual harassment cases.

3. On coordination, his Office continued to carry out a range of activities to ensure a collective and aligned conversation amongst the assurance providers and integrity providers. This whole-of-system approach, whilst recognizing the mandates and roles of individual entities, was crucial for overall efficiency and effectiveness. It also enabled collaboration for example, in coordinating the oversight entities' work plans to ensure appropriate assurance coverage, thereby avoiding gaps and overlaps again for example, in the undertaking of a collective review of integrity entities data to inform system levels improvements.

4. On capacity building, his Office had continued to drive its own efficiency through the use of artificial intelligence and remote digital forensic tools for its investigations and qualitative data analysis tools to gather insight from assurance work. It had also continued to enhance the capacity of others, with training to UNHCR staff and implementing partners on addressing fraud and sexual misconduct, reaching nearly 3000 people worldwide. For the first time, his Office led training for investigators across the United Nations system, with the aim of bringing coherence and exchanging best practices. On learning, his Office continued to provide a range of products to support the UNHCR management team, including 41 Management Implication Reports issued last year to learn lessons from his Office's investigations. The strategic oversight team had delivered a range of analysis and advice pieces in support of the senior management team on key strategic risk areas during 2023, for example, a root cause analysis of persistent oversight findings.

5. The Inspector General said that it had been a challenging year for UNHCR in terms of increasing demand for its services and resource constraints and during which UNHCR had made significant organizational progress with both of those themes reflected in the work of oversight. He wished to make five observations. Firstly, on transparent stakeholder reporting, he indicated that giving confidence in the work of UNHCR had been a priority for oversight providers and his Office had supported a range of formal and informal briefings to Member States in 2023. It had also supported a range of donor specific inquiries, including to the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) Assessment. He remained fully committed to transparency and would report from a position independent of UNHCR's management on issues and risks that might arise and continued to have an open door for Member States for any concerns or questions that they wished to raise. Their continued trust and reliance on and use of the work done by oversight providers was essential to minimize costs and maximize trust.

6. Secondly, that there was a golden thread of linked actions nested under the Business Transformation Programme (BTP) of UNHCR, specifically a coherent programme of modernized corporate information technology systems, enabling better use of data for management and oversight, supporting capacity to meaningfully regionalize and decentralize, accompanied with

headquarters rationalization, and all underpinned by improved risk management maturity. Those actions should lead to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of UNHCR. The platform for change was now in place and the real challenge started in 2024: to bring the strands of transformation together and actualize the intended benefits.

7. Third, as from the end of 2023, UNHCR control frameworks, that is the disposition of activities designed to achieve UNHCR policy objectives consistently and fully, were not comprehensively in place and fully functional. This was in part due to changes arising from the new software systems. There was still variability in the performance of UNHCR control frameworks, leading in turn to some unreliable risk management outcomes, which were identified in oversight reports. A key component requiring further attention was to deliver on improved second-line oversight from headquarters, and especially from the Regional Bureaux.

8. Fourth, UNHCR, as a mandate-led organization placed high reliance on the cultural norms of its staff and partner organizations to ensure integrity and ethical standards were delivered. His Office had seen a 29 per cent increase in the number of misconduct complaints it had registered in 2023, compared to 2022. Similarly, other UNHCR integrity entities and those across the United Nations system had also seen an increase. Whilst that may have reflected increased confidence in the systems of complaint and response, it could also suggest an increase in the underlying challenges. Finally, within the overall increase, there was still variability in the levels and rates of integrity issue reporting, with an unintuitive and uneven distribution of misconduct complaints, including many cold spots across UNHCR operations globally.

9. All of the Inspector General's observations were areas for collective focus for UNHCR's management and his Office in 2024. For example, his Office had a collective view and plan of oversight of the BTP until 2026 and would also take further steps to enhance efficiency and effectiveness during 2024, as the opening of the year suggested a further increase in complaints.

10. In closing, 2023 had been a year during which the demand on UNHCR and on its independent oversight system, both for integrity and assurance, had increased significantly. The various entities and services had largely stepped up in quality and quantity and a whole-of-system approach to integrity and assurance had been adopted. The third-line functions had worked well and increasingly so with UNHCR's first- and second-line management. Nevertheless, the oversight system and UNHCR were under extreme pressure and there was therefore a need for logical and sensible reforms of UNHCR under the BTP to bear real fruit in 2024, specifically through enhanced second-line management oversight.

11. The representative of **Switzerland** thanked the Inspector General for his valuable work and the oral update on his work. Efforts to raise awareness, provide training and give access to information on complaints' mechanisms continued to bear fruit and his country fully supported the continuation of such efforts. The number of complaints continued to rise and more and more cases were being examined. Fortunately, however, the number of substantiated cases remained modest. The victim-centred approach, with 92 per cent of cases of victims of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse being dealt with, was also moving in the right direction. The fact that awareness had increased was an important deterrent, as potential offenders knew that the likelihood of reporting was increasing. However, there was another deterrent that needed to be addressed in more detail: this was the application of the different types of sanctions, in particular cases referred to local authorities. The recent report on the High Commissioner's disciplinary practice mentions only 4 such cases. The representative wondered whether the Inspector General might provide more details on why this was so.

12. The representative of the **United States of America** thanked the Inspector General for his thorough update and commended the Inspector General's Office for its strategic oversight efforts and the implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing investigations and risk prevention. As outlined in the latest update, the focus on addressing financial fraud and sexual misconduct was particularly noteworthy. However, her Government was concerned about the significant increase in complaints of misconduct in some locations, while other locations had little to no reporting. It encouraged UNHCR to delve deeper into the emerging trends from these complaints to identify and rectify systemic issues.

13. The advancement and training and awareness programs on integrity and the use of technology to streamline processes were commendable. Yet even with efficiency gains from better processes

and technology, the representative wondered how the Inspector General's Office planned to sustain its efficiency and effectiveness in the long run, as the demand for oversight escalated and resources remained limited. Her country was pleased to note that the MOPAN Assessment found UNHCR had significantly increased its risk management since the last assessment. However, the assessment also noted the unevenness of policy and implementation across a decentralized UNHCR. Similarly, as noted, regional breakdowns of complaints received were highly uneven. Her Government urged the Organization to implement continuous improvement and oversight mechanisms to ensure comprehensive accountability and transparency and coherent policy implementation across all operations. Finally, strengthening local partners capacity to manage risk and meeting risk mitigation standards were essential to effective humanitarian programmes. The United States of America looked forward to hearing more about UNHCR strategies to ensure the highest standards of conduct and accountability across all operations.

14. The representative of **Denmark** expressed its appreciation for the regular updates and commended the overall commitment of UNHCR to continuous improvement to prevent and address any forms of misconduct. Transparency and accountability in all aspects of UNHCR work was crucial, both to the people UNHCR served and to its Member States. This was of particular importance for donors given the high amount of unearmarked funding her country had provided to UNHCR. Her Government commended the work of Inspector General's Office over the past year and acknowledged the efficiency and effectiveness measures that had enabled his Office to handle the increasing number of cases. In relation to the increasing number of cases, her country acknowledged the analysis that that might very well reflect enhanced awareness and reporting practices across the organization and was therefore to be interpreted as positive. The representative wondered whether the Inspector General expected to see a stabilization at some point and whether there was any assessment planned on possible changes in the nature of the cases as measures to address the underlying factors for previous cases of misconduct were being implemented.

15. She also highlighted the importance that her country attached to preventing and responding to sexual misconduct, whether sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment and welcomed and acknowledged the strong focus of UNHCR on its victim-centred approach as well as its continuous improvements to pave the way for cultural change and create safe conditions for victims to come forward. In closing, her country noted that the Office had not asked for more funding in 2023, which was of course commendable in a constrained funding environment. Denmark would welcome information about whether the staffing reduction as part of UNHCR alignment to the current funding situation would impact the Office of the Inspector General.

16. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** expressed its sincere appreciation for the presentation by the Inspector General but also for the side event that he had organized in the morning with the participation of the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which provided a good overview of the oversight landscape that UNHCR works with and under. His country wished to support UNHCR's work to support victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, and from the data in the report understood that the Organization would need to provide support to substantially more victims of sexual exploitation and abuse than the United Nations average. It applauded this high level of victim support and called on UNHCR to ensure its quality. Against the backdrop of a reduction in funding and recent large-scale aid diversion cases, it was crucial that UNHCR ensured that those in need actually continued to be reached. This would require continued work around more precise targeting, based on actual needs and vulnerabilities, better monitoring and solid control and risk assessment management mechanisms including by shifting from status-based targeting, to vulnerability-based targeting and, of course, working with other United Nations agencies, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), to use biometric registration and data sharing to avoid duplication. The representative wondered how UNHCR was progressing on those changes to ensure aid actually reached those that were the most in need. Furthermore, while his Government welcomed the Inspector General's Office good relations with OIOS, a number of OIOS recommendations had not yet been addressed or had remained open for a long time. His country wished to understand what the Inspector General's Office was doing in order to systematically address all of those recommendations and ensure their implementation. Moreover, his country was concerned by the impending budget cuts to OIOS, which would force them to cut six of their 25 posts.

17. The Kingdom of the Netherlands wished to understand the rationale behind such cuts, which were higher than the headquarters' average, and to receive more information about prioritization.

The 29 per cent increase in complaints of misconduct in 2023, in comparison with 2022, was not necessarily a bad thing. This trend had also been observed in other United Nations organizations and it could simply be that UNHCR staff and beneficiaries now knew their way to the Inspector General's Office, and that was a good thing. His Government supported and envisaged increases in work on integrity as a means to try to avoid cases where possible, but also acknowledged that UNHCR was simply working in very high risk-prone conditions. In this light, he welcomed the mentioned streamlining and improvements but also wished to underscore that they could only stretch so far and that funding must be maintained at the same level as integrity and assurances demands. And as Switzerland also mentioned, another trend was the substantiation rate of complaints, which needed to be relatively low over the last period. The Kingdom of the Netherlands wished to ask the Inspector General to provide more background on how this should be interpreted.

18. The representative of **Australia** thanked the Inspector General's Office for the update. She said that Australia acknowledged the vital work of the Office in holding perpetrators to account and contributing to the prevention of fraud, misconduct, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Her country noted the increased volume of complaints that the Inspector General's Office received in 2023, the absence of a commensurate increase in resources and the expectation that the complaints would rise again in 2024. It would welcome an update on the ability of the Office to continue to exercise its mandate effectively within its resource envelope.

19. Her Government also noted the substantial gap between the number of complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse received by the Office in both 2022 and 2023, and the number of investigations conducted. She was interested to learn more about the Office's criteria for opening an investigation, how the Office prioritized investigations and what happened to complaints of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse that were not investigated. Like others, her country had also noted the low substantiation rate for complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse and would be interested to hear if the Office could elaborate more on that.

20. The **Inspector General**, in response, said that matters referred to Member States were under the purview of the organization's legal affairs service and so those matters would be better addressed by the Deputy Commissioner. He explained that there was a very substantive process in place and all cases that could be referred, were referred and that there was also a risk assessment which accompanied that process.

21. On the subject of the overall increase in complaints, the Inspector General took the view that the increase in complaints was helpful and that it supported the work that the Office and the Senior Management Team had been doing on zero tolerance of such matters, particularly sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

22. In terms of the cold spots, and how the organization was addressing them, the Inspector General said that he had had a range of conversations with various management colleagues, including each of the Regional Bureau Directors and he would be providing data to highlight those cold spots. In some cases, it reflected the nature of the operations in place which could be interpreted as meaning that those were more oriented to normative work rather than to direct protection work but in many cases, perhaps it reflected the culture or the data systems. The cold spots might also be reflective of affected persons mechanisms. There were therefore a range of things that the organization needed to unpack and he would be working with Regional Bureau Directors to try and identify where those cold spots were. He wondered also if they were legitimately cold or whether there were areas in which the organization could improve the flow of information and data.

23. On the issue of resources, the Inspector General indicated that resourcing was a challenge for the whole of the United Nations system and the whole of UNHCR and was not something unique to his Office and to his oversight teams. His Office had taken a number of measures on resourcing. Firstly, the Office wished to achieve more with existing resources, was working more cohesively, as it had highlighted in the side event earlier, and was trying to ensure that the right tool was used for the right job. An investigation was not always the right tool: it could be slow, expensive and involved due process in trying to get issues resolved, particularly those of an interpersonal nature; line management, or mediation, with support from the Ombudsperson, might be more suitable. All of those other solutions were ways to improve the efficiency of the system so that his Office could focus its efforts on misconduct and particularly potential sexual misconduct. The Office also carried out effective planning on assurance and integrity to ensure that gaps and duplication were removed. Communication was key to ensure all of the issues were handled effectively between his and other

teams and that the issues were being handled in a logical order.

24. Specifically in relation to his Office in terms of efficiency, it had taken a number of steps last year, and here he wished to give full credit to the Head of the Investigation Unit, who had managed to maintain operations whilst at the same time reconfiguring the process.

25. The Office had implemented a more efficient intake process with clear reporting forms and was now exploring efficient processes, particularly around using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to form initial judgments around intake assessment. It was also giving more importance to its processes and rather than allowing an investigator to start working on the detail of issues and identify what the problems might be, his Office carried that out at the intake stage by handing over a set of defined and understood issues.

26. The Office made smarter referrals to ensure it understood where the best solution was, whether that was with management and or with partners, with around 45 per cent of the intake referred to a partner of some sort, whether external United Nations partners, or partners working on behalf of UNHCR or management. It also promoted learning to avoid continuing to investigate or carrying out assurance of the same problems. What was vital was to ensure that the issues did not reoccur and risk-based reports, guidance and briefings were issued to that effect. To ensure the non-reoccurrence of issues, the Office also issued mandatory implication reports.

27. The Office was also looking forward to supporting second-line management, which is what the golden thread of the BTP was in essence. This concerned management and ensuring that fewer items were submitted to headquarters; this was also good management practice in terms of handling staff and staff disputes.

28. All of the above meant that handling these issues remained a challenge and would remain so. Looking forward, the Inspector General, based on the current run rate, estimated that 2024 would see an approximate 5 per cent increase. This number was unlikely to stabilize in the near future and if he continued to discuss the cold spots with his team, it could even change further but this was not necessarily a bad thing as long as his Office were efficiently and effectively targeting the right responses.

29. Overall the organization's substantiation rates had dropped slightly from 55 per cent to 45 per cent this year, but the overall number of investigations was only about 9 per cent of the total intake. The 9 per cent represented investigations conducted internally, approximately 175 investigations this year could obfuscate what were relatively small absolute numbers. However, in terms of the breakdown of typologies, for sexual harassment the substantiation rate was quite high at between 70 per cent to 80 per cent. For sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA), this was approximately 17 per cent. In detail, the SEA numbers corresponded to registering 434 complaints within mandate in relation to SEA, of which 256 met the identified or identifiable victim criteria, and were entered into the United Nations IReport tracker. Approximately 80 per cent of those related to UNHCR implementation partners, and only a minority of the non-viability cases proceeded from a victim-care and victim-centred perspective, or perhaps there were witness protection issues. Of the 29 investigations opened last year, 12 had to be closed before they were completed due to not being able to proceed without doing harm and of those only two were unfounded. Unfounded means that those complaints were untrue when tested against evidence. A number of others were unsubstantiated, which means that the evidence for the complaint was insufficient. The Inspector General stated that the bar for evidence is a legal standard that was set for the United Nations system as a whole and was a relatively high bar. This did not mean that those items that were not necessarily substantiated did not result in other forms of sanctions, nor did it mean that the 80 per cent of complaints related to implementing partners were not investigated, as these were carried out by its partners. It was unclear whether there were changes in the nature of cases as the controls improved. He had not seen things go wrong in the same place in the same way which was a good sign but similar things did go wrong in other places and that involved second-line controls and oversight and how the organization could leverage BTP to ensure more data, more evidence-based oversight and more consistency.

30. On staffing reductions, the Inspector General went through a limited staffing reduction last year and no significant reductions had occurred this year, although it was also true that all parts of the system, all parts of oversight needed to look at efficiency and effectiveness and his Office would continue to do that. As discussions around resources arose later in the year, such gains would be part

of the broader conversation, just as in any other parts of the organization.

31. The Inspector General said that there was not a large number of outstanding OIOS recommendations. He had received a number of reports from OIOS at the end of the previous year but some issues had been flagged to Regional Bureau Directors. A tracker system highlighted such issues and his Office would support the Senior Management Team to drive some progress on this point and obtain closure of some outstanding recommendations, in particular where these only concerned points of evidence rather than substantive changes. In relation to OIOS, he did not wish to comment specifically as it was beyond his mandate and remit to decide on budgeting and resources for them. He would say that efficiency and effectiveness was expected in all parts of the United Nations system, even the independent parts, and he would be expecting any changes to be based on value, efficiency and effectiveness and to ensure that their resources were optimised, similarly to practices in UNHCR.

32. The **Deputy High Commissioner** thanked the delegations and said that she wished to respond to the delegation of Switzerland with regard to referred cases. Referrals depended on the particularities of the cases and not every separation case would involve criminal conduct; much depended on the national laws in those particular cases. Overall, it was quite rare for referrals to States to result in prosecution and what was vital to the process was follow-up. Once a referral had been made, the organization no longer had any control over the outcome.

33. She hoped that the Committee had been able to read the disciplinary digest that had been sent out in the year. This was the first time that it had been shared, although the High Commissioner had been producing the digest for several years. This digest was an internal tool used not only to indicate the typology of cases or how they were addressed but also a management tool for discussions around preventing such abuse reoccurring. Any feedback on that particular communication tool was very welcome.

34. Secondly, on accountability, the Deputy High Commissioner said that the organization was in the process of finalizing an updated accountability framework and that this was being led internally by the Transformation and Change Service. This framework was expected to strengthen second-line functions, and roles and responsibilities as well as management controls. It was expected to be finalized by the third quarter of this year. Also, in addition to the accountability framework, decentralization and regionalization evaluation was being undertaken this year and this would help UNHCR learn the lessons on second-line functions and particularly the responsibilities at the regional bureau level that could be reinforced.

35. On sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, she believed that this was not only taken very seriously as regards the formal part of the independent processes but also on the management side, from a prevention perspective and not just within UNHCR, but across the United Nations system as a whole. The organization now had a new Principal Coordinator for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment, and she encouraged delegations to reach out to her to follow up on some of these elements. She believed that there was still some under-reporting on the strategy implemented from 2023 to 2025 particularly with regard to the survivor-centred approach. Issues related to overall budget constraints and cuts were not going to be solved by targeting, although the organization has been continuing to do so to the extent possible to try to reach the most vulnerable. Incidents of survivor sex have been observed in several operations with food cuts as a means for families to be able to feed themselves. UNHCR would redouble its efforts to address this. Funding was the big answer in terms of making sure that there were resources available to support such efforts but it could not be the only answer to ensure that the organization's systems were very strong. The organization had invested very substantially over the last few years in improving reporting on sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment as well as experiential learning which has been rolled out to many operations. The NotOnlyMe was an innovative tool that was gaining traction both internally and externally, in which other agencies had shown interest. The organization was promoting protection from sexual abuse and the survivor-centred approach on the global networks mentioned previously and also on the Peer Advisor Networks with regard to sexual harassment.

36. As concerns the OIOS recommendations, the organization was very focused on those still open, which mainly concerned operations. Much progress had been made on closing the old recommendations but that despite a slowdown, new efforts would be made to address any open recommendations.

5. Oral update on the Executive Committee Conclusions

37. The **Executive Committee Rapporteur (Uganda)** said that last year her predecessor had negotiated a multi-year work plan listing topics for the Executive Committee conclusions that would be considered on a yearly basis, which had been adopted at the Executive Committee (ExCom), last October. Following that exact list that had been adopted, she indicated that the topic of conclusions for the current year was focused on durable solutions and complementary pathways.

38. The Rapporteur had already reached out informally to some of the Member States and this had led to an initial technical briefing on this topic that was held on February 16. The briefing was intended to bring together humanitarian experts on durable solutions and complementary pathways from all different sectors. Also present at that briefing was a refugee who told their story, and discussions focussed on what multilateralism and partnerships could bring to durable solutions. Documentation from that briefing had been shared but the Rapporteur also had some copies for distribution with her if so required. The briefing provided attendees with a deeper understanding of the topic and complexities of durable solutions and complementary pathways.

39. A concept paper had been prepared which would be circulated soon after the end of the Standing Committee and she remained confident that there would be meaningful negotiations on an overdue topic. Negotiations in this area had occurred before but the Committee was looking forward to working with all Member States on this timely topic. Although this was a State-led process, the organization also valued the role of civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). To inform all those present of the calendar for capturing or briefing civil society or NGOs, she indicated that the first meeting to discuss the concept paper would take place on March 28 at 10 a.m. at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, and based on feedback from that meeting a zero draft conclusion report would be prepared shortly after the Easter break. She hoped that the first reading of the zero draft conclusion report would take place on April 25, followed by a second round of informal consultations on May 8, with optionally a third round to take place in the third week of May to adopt the conclusion. It was very much hoped that adoption could be achieved before the end of May but on an exceptional basis, a fourth meeting in June could be arranged.

40. She wanted to finalize the document before summer, as there was a lot of work ahead. This included the preparation of the Omnibus resolution on the Report of the High Commissioner and of the General Assembly resolution on Africa, as well as the next Executive Committee and Standing Committee meetings. The aim was to prepare a one-and-a-half-page document that would be of great assistance for humanitarian staff in the field. It was also hoped that a meeting with NGOs could take place in late May or early June to include their voices. The Rapporteur stressed the importance of cooperation and support in ensuring that the Executive Committee Conclusions would be finalized over the course of perhaps only two meetings

41. The representative of **the Republic of the Congo** on behalf of the African group thanked the Executive Committee Rapporteur for her Oral Update and for her recent technical briefing on durable solutions and complementary pathways. Given the global number of forcibly displaced, currently estimated at over 110 million, including 50 million under UNHCR's remit, the African Group had taken note of this year's conclusion on durable solutions and complementary pathways. Escalating conflicts and the negative impact of climate change on the African continent, which had exacerbated forced displacements and the need for funding to support and meet the increase in the number of persons, had only confirmed the urgent need for all Member States to prioritize Impact Area 4 of the Global Compact on Refugees, namely durable solutions and complementary pathways. It was regrettable that Impact Area 4 was the most underfunded of all impact areas; this situation required an urgent collective response. Consequently, at a time when the Committee was discussing this year's conclusions, the African Group wished to confirm their support for the Rapporteur throughout the negotiation process. Equally, it respectfully invited other Member States to support the Rapporteur and constructively engage from a humanitarian viewpoint to reach an achievable and suitable conclusion.

42. The representative of **Algeria**, aligning itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African group, thanked the Rapporteur for the update and confirmed his support in negotiations on the draft decision. He recalled the importance of implementing the provisions of the Global Compact on Refugees, particularly those on solutions. These must take into account protecting the dignity of

refugees with voluntary return to their countries when possible. He emphasized the need to distinguish between the different situations of refugees as some would require a political approach before a possible return. Cases involving foreign domination should be of particular focus.

43. The representative of **Mexico** said she welcomed the oral update on the draft conclusion and reiterated its commitments to topics discussed. There was a need to strengthen actions to achieve sustainable solutions that addressed specific population needs. The number of people seeking international protection in Mexico was unprecedented. Since 2021, more than 80,000 persons had been recognized as refugees or had received additional support. Integration efforts needed to continue nationally, regionally and globally. States working with other actors needed to create the necessary conditions to integrate refugees in the labour market, ensure access to education and all basic services, ensuring inclusion and a human rights focus. She welcomed the information from the meeting with civil society organizations and hoped for fruitful results. On additional pathways, adequate mechanisms were required to facilitate family reunions, as well as to promote and explore better educational and other solutions for refugees. This required the examination of additional opportunities alongside the private sector, educational systems and host communities. Strategies needed to be strengthened to address root causes that led to the need for international protection, contributing to ways for a safe, dignified return. She welcomed the timeline arising from the consultation process and the concept note.

44. The representative of **Burkina Faso**, aligning herself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African group, said that the Sahel countries sheltered around 2.8 million displaced persons as well as over 500,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Burkina Faso faced high levels of internal displacement, aggravated by insecurity. With more than 37,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and nearly two million internally displaced people on its territory, Burkina Faso continued to reorganize its legal and institutional system and develop reintegration initiatives for better protection of vulnerable groups. At the recent Global Refugee Forum, Burkina Faso committed to strengthening its protection mechanisms through the adoption of a revised legal framework relating to asylum, a law domesticating the Kampala Convention, the revised Persons and Family Code, and the adoption of a strategy and an action plan on the local integration of refugees in Burkina Faso. These strong commitments demonstrated the importance that Burkina Faso attached to the situation of people placed under the UNHCR mandate and their implementation should allow better consideration of the concerns of vulnerable populations and encourage the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons. Better protection of refugees required the pooling of efforts, in a spirit of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing in the interests of vulnerable populations. She thanked the UNHCR Country Office in Ouagadougou for its unwavering commitment on the ground and called for a significant strengthening of its budget.

45. The representative of **Türkiye** thanked UNHCR for its update and expressed support for the process, with a focus on making concrete and sustainable improvements in the lives of persons of concern. As a major host country, this year's conclusion was very important to Türkiye and it would remain closely engaged.

46. The representative of the **United States of America** thanked UNHCR and the rapporteur for work on the conclusion. She hoped the final conclusion for this critical topic would be balanced among all durable solutions.

47. The representative of **Canada** said he recognized that humanitarian needs had risen faster than available resources, thus the humanitarian response needed to prioritize the most vulnerable. He called on UNHCR to implement humanitarian action accounting for a gender-based approach, fully implementing the diversity approach, incorporating protection principles throughout and acting in line with the UNHCR protection policy. Canada contributed to response through both traditional refugee resettlement and crisis response and for populations at risk such as in Afghanistan, the Sudan and Ukraine. They supported populations at risk, including human rights defenders and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other persons and their families. Building and scaling complementary pathways were important for diversifying access to third country solutions alongside core resettlement programmes, government-assisted refugee resettlement and private sponsorships programmes. He encouraged the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.

48. The representative of **the Sudan** said that the war launched by the Rapid Support Forces had led to nine million people being displaced, of which two million had left to neighbouring countries. Many Sudanese had resorted to traffickers to go to Egypt or Europe. He thanked countries that had

taken in Sudanese who had fled, but hoped that Sudanese fleeing conflict were met with better passage and hosting conditions. He called on countries to uphold the principles of the 1951 Refugee Convention and human rights conventions, by allowing for passage of all refugees without discrimination, ensuring regular pathways for migration and observing the principle of non-refoulement.

49. The representative of the **Bondeko Refugee Livelihoods Center, speaking on behalf of a wide range of NGOs**, called for a new emphasis on durable solutions linked to the principle of voluntariness. The ExCom conclusion should revise the information that voluntary repatriation was the preferred durable solution since it may not reflect aspirations and could undercut political will for other solutions. It was hoped that the conclusion would build on the Evaluation of the Office's Repatriation Programmes and Activities 2015-2021 and NGOs looked forward to discussing progress around the Evaluation's recommendations and especially UNHCR policies and operational guidance.

50. Local integration was considered limited and NGOs called on the ExCom conclusion to address a lack of national political will, low international funding, difficulty to measure and a lack of guidance. Refugee access to legal support remained a concern and refugees including children were vulnerable to exploitation and denial of basic legal protections.

51. On third country solutions for resettlement, states should adopt multi-year planning and flexible funding, use innovative processing modalities and ensure programmes aligned with UNHCR priorities without restrictive criteria. Regarding family reunification, states should implement policy changes, administrative and procedural flexibility to ensure access to family reunification, especially for unaccompanied and separated children. Concerning skills-based pathways, states should lift barriers in access to education, visas and labour mobility and ensure skills-based pathways offer protection from refoulement with a path to permanent status, and provide integration support.

52. NGOs urged states to adopt community sponsorship programmes. Guidance on the role of third country solutions in responding to climate change and natural disasters would also be welcome. Good practice in the Afghanistan and Ukraine responses should be mainstreamed, ensuring the durability of programmes. States must not use temporary pathways as a rationale for imposing restrictions that limited people's ability to seek protection.

53. He highlighted a connection between socioeconomic inclusion in host communities and opportunities for solutions, self-reliance programmes, allowing refugees to contribute and pursue opportunities elsewhere. Host communities could participate and benefit from such programmes. Refugee travel documents issued by host countries that allowed refugees to travel globally could advance solutions as proof of identity, to foster socioeconomic inclusion and allow refugees to pursue study and work opportunities globally without fear of refoulement. Meaningful refugee participation and leadership was a critical cross-cutting foundation for successful solutions. The Global Compact on Refugees underscored the importance of involving refugees in decision-making processes, but the inability of refugee leaders to freely move across borders limited their contributions to solutions. He called on the international community to ensure the meaningful inclusion of refugee voices in national forums to shape policies. Steps were required to enable refugees to exercise their right to free movement.

54. **The ExCom Rapporteur** thanked delegations for their contributions, agreeing that it was necessary to ensure a balanced, representative document that reflected needs on the ground in close collaboration with all stakeholders. She called for the collective depoliticization of the process and the use of a humanitarian lens to develop a document that would help colleagues in the field.

6. Strategic partnerships, including coordination (EC/75/SC/CRP.6)

55. The **Director of the Division of External Relations**, accompanying her remarks with a digital slide presentation, shared an overview of progress and developments in the Office's strategic partnerships in 2023. The organization's collaboration with partners was guided by four tenets: placing affected populations at the centre, upholding protection principles, championing localization, and assisting governments on responses to displacement and statelessness. UNHCR continued to exercise its leadership and coordination responsibilities in refugee situations, building on governments' central role in leading responses. In 2023, the Office had eight Regional Refugee Response Plans covering 53 hosting countries, of which three plans were co-led with the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and all were underpinned by the refugee coordination model. UNHCR had over 1,400 partners appealing for \$12.5 billion to assist approximately 21.8 million displaced and 14 million host community members. UNHCR had received \$4 billion.

56. On internal displacement, UNHCR continued to support a timely, people-centred and protection-focused response, advocating for a solutions approach from the outset. UNHCR remained committed to advancing the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. In 2023 UNHCR had seconded staff to the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement as well as to the Resident Coordinator offices in Afghanistan and Yemen to better the lives of millions of internally displaced persons. The Office had helped to shape the IASC strategic priorities and had coordinated and led on the protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) clusters. Collaboration under the United Nations Common Pledge 2.0, co-led by UNHCR with the United Nations Development Coordination Office and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, saw a coming together of United Nations bodies on refugee inclusion in 2023. This demonstrated the Office's convening power, with over 100 commitments from 19 United Nations partners and 50 United Nations country teams. Collaboration with sister organizations and agencies had been incredibly productive in 2023 through the strengthening of partnerships under the triple nexus umbrella, working towards the inclusion of refugee children in national systems with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and strengthening protection solutions in the context of mixed movements of refugees and migrants. UNHCR advocated for a route-based approach and would continue to do so with IOM. UNHCR had quadrupled the number of refugees that attended the Global Refugee Forum 2023 compared to 2019. Together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), UNHCR held seven regional NGO consultations, bringing together some 1500 participants, including local refugee-led organizations, civil society and local NGOs. UNHCR was working to operationalize its localization guidelines to set the standards of its approach. It had invested in refugee-led innovation funds and remained completely aligned and steadfast with the tenets of the Grand Bargain 2.0 and its commitment to core objectives.

57. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, a multi-stakeholder pledge on sports for protection and inclusion was made by 140 stakeholders. The 'More Than A Game' sports strategy was rolled out in 17 country operations and many new partnerships were strengthened and developed.

58. UNHCR was fully committed to a system-wide reform and efforts in support of the 2030 Agenda, had a 99 per cent participation rate in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and by 2024 would contribute to the resident coordinator system by approximately \$2.3 million. She called on delegates to continue to support the Development Coordination Office. UNHCR engagement with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) had resulted in large allocations to refugee-hosting countries through development funds. Its partnership with the World Bank group had enabled \$4.1 billion in investments in 17 low-income host countries since 2017 and its collaboration with the International Finance Corporation had helped to mobilize the private sector in many countries. UNHCR also worked with development actors such as the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the *Agence française de développement* (French Development Agency), Germany's Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships.

59. The representative of the **Philippines** said it was essential that UNHCR worked within the United Nations development system, conscious of efficiency, effectiveness, agility and non-duplication. She supported further localization efforts, as well as encouraging inclusion and meaningful participation of national and local actors. She requested clarification on how UNHCR was exercising due diligence and transparency in selecting, coordinating and monitoring UNHCR partners. She also asked whether UNHCR would include updates on its coordination of issues related to disaster and climate change-induced displacement alongside partners in future reports.

60. The representative of **Nigeria, speaking on behalf of the African group**, expressed concern that the number of forcibly displaced persons continued to rise in Africa. Meaningful and sustained partnerships had become integral to address challenges affecting displaced populations in Africa. The group acknowledged UNHCR efforts to diversify and advance partnerships and strengthen collaboration across the triple nexus. This approach required collective and concerted effort. She

emphasized the need for synergy between UNHCR and other organizations to avoid duplication of programming and promote effective processes. Financial partnerships should not have negative impacts on fragile African economies. She welcomed strengthened partnerships with the African Development Bank to address forced displacement and fragility in Africa. She called on UNHCR to maximize partnerships that provided sustained solutions to complex displacement challenges in Africa, to ensure alignment of priorities with governments and remain focused on its partnership objectives to provide protection, assistance and solutions to displaced populations globally.

61. The representative of **Norway** welcomed UNHCR progress in diversifying and strengthening its partnerships, particularly through including local organizations and mechanisms of meaningful participation by the displaced and stateless people. On MOPAN recommendations, he looked forward to learning more about UNHCR progress in simplifying cooperation mechanisms with partners. He expected UNHCR to engage in genuine dialogue to develop these agreements by adjusting reporting requirements and increasing multi-year and flexible funding. Norway welcomed UNHCR engagement to strengthen the quality of action towards internal displacement notably through the work of the special adviser on solutions to internal displacement and in the inter-agency standing committee (IASC) internal review. Following the recent Global Refugee Forum, Norway encouraged UNHCR to rethink refugee responses in a longer-term perspective. UNHCR needed to de-centre itself operationally and ensure it did not become the primary long-term service provider in protracted refugee situations. Development actors needed to take more responsibility, in cooperation with host countries and countries of origin, to include displacement solutions in their programmes.

62. The representative of **Mexico** praised UNHCR multi-actor approach on the ground and multilaterally. This had been reflected in effective cooperation, as well as building humanitarian, development and peace synergies. Tangible impact had been seen in Latin America and the Caribbean through close cooperation between UNHCR and the Comprehensive Regional Protection and Solutions Framework (MIRPS framework), as well as local integration programmes with associations and governmental authorities. One programme presented formal employment opportunities for refugees in Mexico. Through this programme over 60,000 refugees had received access to education and personalized support and more than 600 businesses had benefited from new refugee workers. Mexico welcomed the active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the Global Refugee Forum 2023, including a larger number of refugees. He requested further details of the progress made by IOM and UNHCR in identifying challenges and opportunities to strengthen cooperation in implementing the global compacts on migration and refugees. He reiterated the need to continue strengthening the work done within associations on displacement because of climate change and disasters; this needed to be strengthened transversally within the UNHCR framework. Mexico welcomed UNHCR work on structural change and its strong commitment to seek comprehensive solutions and cooperation to address changing conditions and increasing global challenges.

63. The representative of **Sweden** commended the Office's increased focus on localization and meaningful engagement with affected populations in view of the recent MOPAN recommendations related to localization and she looked forward to seeing the operational localization guidelines. She recognized the Office's role in including development actors in responsibility-sharing for the process of seeking durable solutions for the people of concern to UNHCR and recognized its catalytic role in convening development and humanitarian actors during the recent Global Refugee Forum. She appreciated the Office's contribution to the United Nations Development Systems reform, through financial contribution to the resident coordinator system and its engagement to link operations to the Sustainable Development Goals. She noted that UNHCR was a member of United Nations Country Teams in all countries where it was present. She noted that the Office's programmes were aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in these countries.

64. Sweden commended UNHCR for its role in championing the centrality of protection and its leadership of the Global Protection Cluster and encouraged efforts to include civil society in decision-making structures and coordination. Sweden called on UNHCR to remain a strong champion for protection and support collective efforts to ensure that protection was at the centre of response to internal displacement, including the solutions agenda. Sweden would follow and support UNHCR and partners in the process of taking IASC protection policy review recommendations forward, as well as in the forthcoming review of the IASC response to internal displacement. Donor

support and engagement were required for this.

65. The representative of **Switzerland** said that, given a lack of funding for inter-agency work on refugees, there were significant variations in operations. This confirmed the importance of anticipating financing needs for emergencies with more generous, non-ring-fenced contributions for global emergency organizations and global funds. He asked how UNHCR would be taking the fundamental recommendations of the IASC review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement into account. Switzerland supported the Technical Hub, which would allow more effective and rapid response in terms of financial transactions amongst organizations, offering several million dollars a year in cost savings. He welcomed UNHCR cooperation efforts with civil society organizations, with explicit mention of organizations directed by displaced persons, sporting organizations and IFIs. Switzerland encouraged UNHCR to progress and expand this cooperation, in addition to considering cooperation with academia and religious institutions.

66. The representative of **Japan** welcomed UNHCR increased coordination with development agencies and others in the context of the triple nexus approach. Japan echoed UNHCR view on the need to consider involving development agencies from crisis outset and to have a picture of exit strategies. He asked to what extent UNHCR coordination of activities with development agencies and IOM had reduced UNHCR cost requirements, believing that promoting such linkages would also increase the possibility of reallocating surplus funds generated to cover the costs of other projects such as food and repatriation costs.

67. The representative of **Germany** wished to commend UNHCR on its increasing engagement with development actors, which was essential in order to facilitate durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons and to create synergies for cooperation. His country remained committed to building inclusive societies to improve the self-reliance of displaced persons and their host communities.

68. In view of the challenging funding situation, it was more important than ever for UNHCR to focus on its core mandate. In that connection, he encouraged UNHCR, as well as all relevant agencies, notably IOM and OCHA, to coordinate their activities, in line with their respective mandates and comparative advantages, in order to act as one United Nations. It was paramount for UNHCR to follow through with its various existing cooperation agreements with other agencies and to develop additional agreements in areas such as the response to internally displaced persons or the effects of climate change on displaced populations.

69. Commending UNHCR on its efforts to cooperate with NGOs and local partners in its response to refugees and displaced persons, he nevertheless noted that the recent assessment of UNHCR by MOPAN had identified room for improvement in the areas of financial risk management and programming with local actors. He called on UNHCR to enable those actors to engage in a way that went beyond the role of implementing partner.

70. The representative of the **United States of America** expressed her country's support for the Office's partnership strategy, which prioritized community-based protection and put affected people and communities at the centre of its responses. She was pleased to note the significant increase in the involvement of local and national actors and encouraged UNHCR to continue to engage with them in its refugee response plans and programming and to expand direct funding to those organizations.

71. The Office's leadership was essential in the response to internally displaced persons. She expressed her appreciation for its collaboration with the United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Solutions to Internal Displacement and encouraged it to implement the recommendations contained in the independent review of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action and the Independent Review of the Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement.

72. The United States would continue to promote a whole-of-society approach to address the unprecedented levels of displacement. It valued the ability of UNHCR to drive other stakeholders to achieve better protection and solutions for forcibly displaced people and, in the face of immense needs and a constrained resource environment, urged it to continue to build healthy and equitable partnerships, based on trust and jointly determined objectives, with development actors, NGOs, civil society and affected communities and persons.

73. She appreciated the efforts that had been made by UNHCR, its partner agencies and host

governments to work towards inclusion, which benefited local communities and refugees alike. The United States would continue to advocate in that area and to support related initiatives, notably the International Financial Corporation-UNHCR joint initiative for private sector solutions to forced displacement, to which it had pledged \$3 million.

74. She asked UNHCR to continue to share information on strategic partnerships that were advancing positive outcomes for refugees, stateless persons and host communities and on how Member States might support such efforts.

75. The representative of **Australia** welcomed the update on the strategic partnerships of UNHCR and commended the Office for its continued focus on diversifying its partnerships, strengthening collaboration across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and elevating the voices of people affected by crises.

76. Her country was committed to localizing humanitarian action and ensuring the meaningful participation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, as demonstrated by its pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. Commending UNHCR on the strides it had made to increase representation of forcibly displaced and stateless persons within the context of the Forum, she nevertheless maintained that further work was needed in that area. As co-chair of the Coalition on Meaningful Refugee Participation, Australia would continue to advance that agenda and looked forward to further collaborating with UNHCR in that regard.

77. To ensure the meaningful participation of the most marginalized, forcibly displaced and stateless persons, Australia focused particular attention on supporting women refugee leaders and striving for inclusive humanitarian action that addressed the diverse needs of all persons, including women, persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual persons. In that connection, it welcomed the Office's work to promote inclusion and to develop localization guidelines, and it expressed its support for the expansion of the Refugee-led Innovation Fund.

78. Noting the outcome of the recent assessment of UNHCR by MOPAN, she said she would be interested in learning more about the steps UNHCR was taking to improve its partnership management, to deliver quality funding, particularly multi-year funding, and to contribute to overhead costs and to local actors and organizations led by forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

79. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that he recognized the Office's contribution to the reform of the United Nations development system and its support for the leadership of Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators within countries. It was imperative to empower Resident Coordinators as they played a fundamental role in unifying the development system.

80. Acknowledging the Office's efforts to establish strategic partnerships with other United Nations entities, he said that it was essential for all actors to deliver on the basis of their comparative advantages rather than individual agency funding targets, in order to further reduce duplication of efforts and to generate synergies at country level. Such action was even more important in the light of the foreseen budget reductions.

81. Transparency and accountability were critical to achieving an effective development system. While he appreciated the funding compact update, he said it would be useful to know why not all indicators had been included in it.

82. Noting the clear connection between humanitarian action and development work, he said he wished to know how many of the multi-year country-level strategies were linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. He would also be interested to know how many UNHCR country representatives received input from the Resident Coordinator in their performance appraisal.

83. He would welcome information on how UNHCR was delivering on the Management and Accountability Framework and on any bottlenecks it had experienced in its implementation. His country requested that UNHCR, as a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), report annually to the Standing Committee on its completion of the United Nations Development System Reform - Checklist for UNSDG Entities' Governing Bodies, which was an essential tool to facilitate the oversight role of the Office's governing bodies.

84. He reiterated that an effective and efficient United Nations development system, operating in a coordinated manner at country level, was crucial in order to facilitate work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

85. The representative of the **European Union** (observer) said that she welcomed the update on the strategic partnerships of UNHCR, underlining the importance of cooperation, not competition, between aid organizations. The European Union appreciated the Office's efforts to build synergies for a robust collective response and stressed the continued need for strong inter-agency coordination on refugee response plans, internal displacement and advocacy for protection, inclusion and solutions, as demonstrated during the Global Refugee Forum 2023, which was a landmark example of meaningful refugee participation.

86. She welcomed the Office's efforts to strengthen the role of the Global Protection Cluster and she called for the swift implementation of all the recommendations made in the independent review of the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, in particular, the need to simplify protection architecture, enhance accountability and ensure humanitarian leadership. The European Union would continue to support efforts by UNHCR in that area.

87. Commending UNHCR for delivering on its protection mandate and fulfilling its leadership role in refugee situations, she encouraged it to rapidly implement the most urgent recommendations contained in the assessment by MOPAN. She also looked forward to the implementation of its Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action.

88. The European Union supported the Office's partnerships with other aid organizations to ensure comprehensive responses and avoid duplication of activities. In that connection, it would be interested to receive more information on the updated route-based approach adopted by UNHCR and IOM and on its concrete implementation. She appreciated the Office's efforts to promote the results of the UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub and welcomed the UNHCR-UNICEF Strategic Collaboration Framework to promote the inclusion of refugee children in national systems. She urged UNHCR to explore new opportunities to strengthen the interoperability of data.

89. Commending UNHCR on its inclusive approach to international and national NGOs, she urged it to continue to make efforts to improve the predictability of its partnerships, in line with commitments made under the Grand Bargain to ensure quality, multi-year funding. In that connection, the European Union was eager to discuss how to guarantee timely and quality reporting to donors.

90. Recalling the Office's role in facilitating cooperation with development partners and international financial institutions, she said that the European Union looked forward to the results of the new strategy of the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, which was a good example of efficient cooperation.

91. She encouraged UNHCR to continue to use multi-year planning and results-based management, further incorporating implementing partners and considering development projects. In line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, she urged UNHCR to improve the sustainability of its institutional arrangements, practical coordination and transfer of roles and responsibilities in order to ensure better inclusion.

92. The **Director of External Relations** (UNHCR), responding to some of the comments made by Member States, said that the issue of climate change had been frequently mentioned. UNHCR was working closely with other United Nations agencies to align their strategies in that area, so as to avoid overlaps, define the focus of each organization and improve coordination at country team level. It would be important to continue in that vein, with all involved agencies drawing on the lessons learned through their work on climate-related issues.

93. Responding to the comments made by the representatives of Switzerland and Sweden, with regard to the Independent Review of the Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement, she said that UNHCR was fully engaged in the follow-up on the recommendations and would continue to champion the centrality of protection.

94. In response to the question on the Office's relationship with IOM, she said that UNHCR was working closely with IOM to update their framework agreement.

95. Responding to the question from the representative of Japan, on how the Office's work with development actors impacted its budget, she said that, when developing a refugee response plan, UNHCR sought to secure the involvement of development actors and host communities from the outset, in line with its key principle of establishing durable solutions from the start of displacement. UNHCR was also undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the contributions of development actors, including international financial institutions. Citing Mauritania as an example, she said that host communities, as well as refugees, were benefiting from the substantial investment of International Development Association funds, meaning that UNHCR did not have to invest as heavily in health care and energy. Such contributions helped to ensure the provision of long-term, sustainable solutions and UNHCR continued to work with partners in the United States in that area.

96. She wished to mention that UNHCR was reviewing its Refugee Coordination Model, liaising with different United Nations bodies in order to find ways to improve the system.

97. On the question of localization and multi-year funding, she said that, in 2022, 28 per cent of global programmes expenditure had been implemented through local and national partners. UNHCR strove to provide multi-year funding; however, it was becoming more challenging to ensure predictable funding. That said, by the end of 2024, all country operations would have multi-year strategies, aligned with the programme cycle of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

7. Programme budgets and funding

a. Update on budgets and funding (EC/75/SC/CRP.8)

98. The **Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results** (UNHCR), accompanying her remarks with a digital slide presentation, said that the document EC/75/SC/CRP.8 provided an update on budgets and funding for 2023 and 2024. The final 2023 budget as at 31 December 2023 was \$10.9 billion. Five supplementary budgets, representing a combined total of \$817.5 million, had been established in 2023 in support of the Sudan, Ukraine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye, Pakistan and Somalia, and the budget for Iraq had been reduced by \$100 million.

99. The total provisional funds available in 2023 stood at \$5.5 billion, representing a decrease of \$679.1 million, or 11 per cent, compared to 2022. The provisional funds available included voluntary contributions of \$4.8 billion, with the remaining funds coming from other sources. The overall funding gap had increased from 42.3 per cent, in 2022, to 49.7 per cent, in 2023, which had had a detrimental impact on operations.

100. Implementation of available funds had remained high in 2023, at \$4.9 billion, representing an 11 per cent decrease compared to 2022, driven by the reduction in the level of funding. Expenditure had decreased in all regions except West and Central Africa, where it had increased owing to the ongoing crisis in the Sudan.

101. The 2024 budget stood at \$10.8 billion, consisting of the original approved budget of \$10.6 billion, plus one supplementary budget established in support of the Sudan situation. In anticipation of the uncertain funding outlook for 2024, UNHCR had taken measures to bolster its systems and processes, cut costs and increase efficiency; notably, it had reduced its workforce by 1000 posts and closed and consolidated 40 offices.

102. Since expenditure by outcome area had decreased significantly compared to 2023, UNHCR would be increasingly forced to make difficult decisions about the assistance it delivered. Approximately 50 per cent of expenditure had been allocated to outcome areas one to six, and assistance under outcome areas seven, eight and nine would only be provided to the most vulnerable. In Europe, for example, expenditure for outcome area one – access to territory, registration and documentation – had fallen from 51 per cent in 2023 to 40 per cent in 2024. The aforementioned prioritization measures would entail reductions in the provision of health care, shelter, core relief items and cash-based interventions, as well as reduced emergency preparedness and response activities, among other consequences.

103. The **Director of the Division of External Relations** (UNHCR), accompanying her remarks with a digital slide presentation, said that the Office's needs continued to outstrip the funds raised. While the size of the forcibly displaced population and the number of emergencies continued to grow, the per capita funds available had decreased over the years, from \$75 in 2013 to \$44 in 2023. Pledges totalling \$973 million had been received from governments at the pledging conference in

December 2023, which represented a decrease of \$162 million compared to the previous year, and some \$1.36 billion had been raised to date, for which she expressed her thanks. At the end of 2022, UNHCR had been 50 per cent funded, with \$5.495 billion estimated funds available. Total voluntary contributions for 2023 stood at \$4.8 billion, 1 billion less than the previous year.

104. She wished to acknowledge the top refugee hosting countries, namely, Türkiye, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Germany, Colombia, Pakistan and Uganda. Three-quarters of the world's refugees were hosted by low- and middle-income countries and one-fifth resided in the world's 46 least developed countries. Commending the generosity of those countries, without which the protection of refugees would not be possible, she stressed their need for sustained, meaningful support.

105. She thanked all donors, particularly those that had provided unearmarked or flexible contributions and those that had increased their contributions. The top three donors – United States, Germany and the European Union – had covered 53 per cent of the total income in 2023, and she was grateful for their generosity. She urged Member States who were not major donors to consider making voluntary contributions or increasing the amount they contributed. She also extended her thanks to the private sector, which was the second largest source of unearmarked contributions, having contributed 39 per cent of the unearmarked funding received in 2023. Now, more than ever, flexible, early and multi-year contributions were needed to help UNHCR better plan, deliver in emergencies and save money.

106. The representative of **Uganda** (African Group statement) said that Africa was grateful to all partners that continued to donate generously to support forcibly displaced persons on the continent and she urged them to maintain their support. She called on non-traditional donors to fulfil their international responsibility by contributing to that important humanitarian cause. Africa's contribution, which took the form of hosting over 50 million persons of concern to UNHCR, was crucial since only after a host State had opened its borders to those in need was it possible to provide them with further support.

107. Faced with rising levels of forced displacement, exacerbated by multiple ongoing conflicts and the devastating effects of climate change, the African Group expressed its deep concern at the steady decline in funding allocated to the continent and the impact it would have on the most vulnerable populations, particularly children. If the trend continued, onward movements, including dangerous journeys by sea, would remain the only plausible option for refugees fleeing for their lives. It was very worrying that, while other regions like Europe had been funded at 70 per cent in 2023, Africa had only been funded at 30 per cent. Moreover, the sharp decline in funding had been most felt in the response to emergency situations, which was a critical part of the UNHCR mandate. Surely the already economically challenged and overburdened African host States were not expected to fill that 70 per cent funding gap?

108. Noting that UNHCR had only been funded at 50 per cent at the end of 2023, she wondered how it planned to fill the gap in the likely scenario that funding also fell short in 2024. It was dispiriting for African States to confirm that, of the 14 most underfunded refugee programmes, 10 were in Africa and all of them in major hosting countries. She expressed her concern that African operations were disproportionately affected by earmarked funding, which accounted for almost 90 per cent of voluntary contributions received as of 1 January 2024. Despite the gross underfunding of African budgets in 2023, a total of \$514.3 million was carried over to 2024 for specific earmarked operations. That reality sadly undermined the essence of humanitarian action, which must be timely and responsive to those in need.

109. African States had made over 200 concrete pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, which it hoped would be matched by partners in order to ease the burden placed on hosting countries. Africa would continue to prioritize humanitarian action by offering a home to its displaced brothers and sisters, in fulfilment of its international responsibility, and it called on all partners to meet its generosity with timely, equitable, predictable and flexible funding for all those in need, irrespective of their location, race or nationality.

110. The **Chairperson** explained that there was extremely limited time remaining for national statements on this item, without even taking into consideration time for responses from the Directors. Therefore, delegations were asked to cut their statements substantially in order to ensure that decisions could be adopted by the end of the meeting at 6.00 p.m.

111. The representative of **Sweden** noted that the \$5 billion decrease in spending on the global

humanitarian response in 2024 from 2023 was an indication of a system trying to prioritize expenditure while needs outstripped resources. She stressed that individuals with the severest need must be first in line for humanitarian services and that needs assessments must be transparent in order to ensure impartial prioritization. Sweden also welcomed the communications of UNHCR on its ongoing assessment realignment process.

112. The representative of **Kenya** expressed appreciation for UNHCR efforts to bring aboard new private donors. However, despite this, she reiterated that Impact Area 4 (Securing solutions) was still the least funded of the Impact Areas in its 2024 budget, preventing UNHCR from delivering on its commitment to sustainably address forced displacement and placing strain on Kenya's overwhelmed hosting system.

113. With earmarked contributions making up a larger share of donations, she supported the call for flexible and unearmarked funding allocations in the draft decision on budgets and funding for 2023 and 2024 in order to enable it to address humanitarian needs whenever and wherever they occur. Furthermore, she requested an itemised budgetary breakdown per country office.

114. The representative of **Japan** pointed to the country's revised Development Cooperation Charter, which committed it to providing quality and flexible funding when needed. There was support for the proposed wording of "with flexible and unearmarked contributions" in Annex IX, but it was felt that it should be tweaked to "flexible resources, including unearmarked contributions".

115. The representative of **Zambia** emphasized that more thought needed to be given to the gravity of ongoing budget cuts and how they would affect refugees, who relied on international support for their basic needs. Should these reductions continue, host countries' abilities to deliver essential services and protection to refugees would be compromised, exacerbating the suffering faced by forcibly displaced individuals and weakening the safeguarding measures available to them. Therefore, sustained and appropriate funding was needed to ensure the well-being of refugees globally, in the spirit of compassion and solidarity.

116. The representative of **Zimbabwe** underscored the pace of temperature increases in her country in recent decades and the likely drought in the current cropping season as a result of El Niño. With this in mind, she welcomed the amendment to the decision point, calling on donors to respond with flexible and unearmarked funding to enable UNHCR to respond flexibly for vulnerable individuals' immediate needs. Requests for UNHCR to provide more funding to Southern Africa were also reiterated.

117. The representative of **Pakistan** illustrated the major resource constraints in his country, a major refugee host, which had been exacerbated by the unprecedented 2022 floods, which had triggered a major wave of poverty and had crippled government finances. While original 2023 UNHCR budget allocation and supplementary appeal were appreciated, efforts to deliver refugee protection and services in the country remained underfunded and hamstrung. He stressed that innovative financial solutions and more unearmarked and flexible resources from donors would enable UNHCR and host countries to respond to emergencies and refugee crises in a timely and predictable manner.

118. The representative of **the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** voiced his concern at the financial deficit of approximately 49.7 per cent of the final total needs for 2023 indicated in the 2023 and 2024 update on budgets and funding. Particular worries were also expressed about the 1.2 per cent downward adjustment to Impact Area 4 (Securing solutions) in the 2024 funding for "Solutions".

119. He underscored that reductions to the UNHCR budget would adversely affect its efforts to find durable solutions for refugees and IDPs, such as effective resettlement and local integration programmes. At the same time, it would also slow down progress towards SDGs and supporting refugees and IDPs, potentially leaving them in prolonged vulnerability.

120. With these circumstances, Venezuela was also highly alarmed that 63.85 per cent of 2023 private-donor funding was earmarked, as this could create a misalignment between specifically funded projects and the specific objectives of the affected countries, resulting in dispersion of efforts and less cohesion in implementing UNHCR mandate. Furthermore, excessive dependency on a small number of principal donors for earmarked financing could leave UNHCR vulnerable to political or economic changes in those countries.

121. The representative of **Germany** called for a transparent process on budget-allocation prioritization and stressed its commitment to working with UNHCR and partners on this area. Additionally, while flexible funding was key to delivering efficient UNHCR assistance, this should be coupled with suitable data and reporting on how these funds impact Member State populations.

122. The representative of **Ethiopia** highlighted the 64 per cent funding gap in UNHCR operations in his country in 2023 and hoped that this would be rectified this year. As a result of limited funding, essential services for refugees, such as food, shelter, education and health care, were under threat, with potential interruptions to refugee children's education, rises in child malnourishment, disease outbreaks and threats of sexual violence for young girls.

123. Despite this dwindling funding, refugee numbers were still increasing, meaning that refugee-host countries were having to do more. Therefore, he called upon donors and Member States to match these efforts in the form of sustained and meaningful financial support. Additionally, appeals were made to UNHCR to prioritise the more underfunded operations and vulnerable people.

124. The **Chairperson** announced that, even with the truncated national statements, not all of the delegations wishing to make statements on this item would be able to do so within the allocated time remaining. Therefore, she proposed that national delegations send their statements to the Secretariat, which would be willing to circulate them, so that the meeting could proceed with adopting the draft decision. The UNHCR would take account of these statements in its future work. There was no objection to this approach.

125. The **Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results**, responding to the national statements, wished to make a couple of corrections on the figures quoted. Firstly, the carryover amounts stated on the Conference Room Papers were preliminary, were prepared before the books were closed and did not take expenditure into account. The 2024 carryover would likely be substantially lower, with a high implementation rate for 2023. Secondly, due to the differences in earmarked funding allocated to different parts of the world, unearmarked and flexible funding was needed to ensure equity at a global level.

126. The representative of **Zambia, speaking on behalf of the African Group**, welcomed the amended Draft Decision on Budgets and Funding for 2023 and 2024, which now included an appeal for Member States to continue providing flexible and unearmarked contributions to ensure that the 2024 annual budget would be fully resourced. While the group appreciated the engagement around amending the budget decision, there was still work ahead to implement it.

127. The African Group believed that equitable burden and responsibility in refugee-hosting was critical, with unearmarked funding in refugee protection playing a vital role. With this in mind, it was concerned that African Countries were most affected by earmarked funding, hampering their attempts to allocate funds in evolving and challenging circumstances. Therefore, they supported the call for more unearmarked funding, as it would enable hosting counties to provide swift responses to refugee dynamics and enable states to invest strategically on promoting self-sufficiency and stability. The African Group was hopeful that donors would offer more unearmarked funding for these types of projects, as it was viewed as an investment in peace, stability and shared prosperity, meaning that all actors must work together to ensure that no refugees or hosts were left behind.

128. The Chairperson, recognizing that no more comments had been raised on the Draft Decision found in Annex IX of Conference Paper 8, deemed the Draft Decision to be adopted by consensus by the delegations.

b. UNHCR programme in the United Nations (EC/75/SC/CRP.7)

129. The **Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results** thanked Member States for their continued support towards UNHCR's programmes and budgets and noted that her statement on this item referred specifically to the funding received from the United Nations Regular Budget (UNRB), with a particular emphasis on the Programme part of the 2025 submission, as set out in EC/75/SC/CRP.7.

130. The United Nations Programme Budget provided only a portion of UNHCR management and administrative costs and the submission process went through New York United Nations committees, running parallel to the overall programme of work presented to Member States. Efforts were being made to cap management and administration costs below 5 per cent of the total budget, with the 2022 figure standing at 3.5 per cent (in the absence of a final 2023 figure). However, the

low United Nations regular budget funding was a cause for concern, as it only covered around 23 per cent of management and administrative costs, falling short of the recommended 50.8 per cent outlined in General Assembly resolution 59/276. Therefore, she appealed for additional support to align regular budget funding with the resolution's recommendations, given the escalating humanitarian needs.

131. The **Chairperson** explained that national delegations' written statements for this item would also be sent to the Secretariat for circulation among Member States and would be forwarded to relevant United Nations bodies to inform their continuing work.

132. She appealed for comments or questions on the Draft Decision before Annex II of Conference Room Paper 7 covering the UNHCR programme was adopted. None were put forward, so the programme was adopted.

8. Any Other Business

133. The **Chairperson**, for the sake of timing, did not make any announcements and stated that, instead, an information email would be circulated on the Monday following the meeting, including the procedural report, summary report, relevant meeting documents and presentations.

134. She invited the national delegations to put forward any relevant AOB points, but none were put forward.

135. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the Chairperson declared the eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 5.47 p.m.