

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

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Held at the International Conference Centre (CICG), Geneva **Summary record,* Monday, 1 July 2024, at 3 p.m.**

Chairperson: Dr. Katharina Stasch..... (Germany)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

2. Programme budgets and funding (continued)

(b) Global Report 2023 (continued)

1. The representative of **Finland** said that record high numbers of forcibly displaced and stateless persons reflected a failure of the international community's efforts to address the root causes of displacement. With the global humanitarian landscape marked by crises of an unprecedented scale, such as the new or newly-escalating conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, Myanmar and the Sudan and the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, many situations where UNHCR was present scarcely made the headlines. The Office's efforts to keep the focus on forgotten crises were therefore appreciated.

2. Like many humanitarian agencies, UNHCR faced a serious funding shortfall that had affected its delivery of assistance and protection and the global outlook remained uncertain. Commending the Office's efforts to find cost efficiencies wherever possible and acknowledging the nearly-impossible choices to be made in prioritizing interventions, he stressed the importance of focusing on those most at risk.

3. UNHCR was one of Finland's most trusted humanitarian partners. Its contributions in 2023 had amounted to \$38.2 million and in recent years, four fifths of that total had been flexible funding. As a signatory to the multi-stakeholder pledge on quality humanitarian funding for refugee situations at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, his Government encouraged donors to consider ways to provide such funding. Since the Office had received tangible results through private sector fundraising and other types of partnership, it should not limit its efforts to expand the donor base to governments but should look into new markets using a comprehensive approach that would fully utilize the competencies and innovative solutions of private sector actors while maintaining principled humanitarian action.

4. The representative of **Denmark** said that the 2023 Global Report made clear what a challenging year it had been. Given the resulting pressures on UNHCR and the difficulties that it had endured, her delegation commended the ongoing efforts to enhance the Office's efficiency and enable it to continue to respond to the needs of the forcibly displaced, regardless of the strain on capacity.

5. The high point of the year had been the Global Refugee Forum 2023, where Member States had demonstrated their commitment to burden- and responsibility-sharing in the many pledges to better implement the Global Compact on Refugees. Denmark was proud to be a leading donor of multi-year unearmarked funding, which enabled a rapid response to the greatest needs, and was increasing its unearmarked contributions as of 2024. It encouraged all new and traditional donors to join the multi-stakeholder pledge on quality humanitarian funding for refugee situations, which it had formulated together with Finland, Iceland, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

6. Cooperation with the private sector remained a priority for her Government. She commended the Office's progress in private sector fundraising and welcomed the development of a new private sector engagement strategy and the focus on holistic partnerships that unlocked the full expertise of partners. The difficult funding environment, the growing needs and the protracted nature of many displacement crises underlined the importance of integrated approaches from a sustainable development perspective. Her Government called on UNHCR to further strengthen its engagement with development actors and increase its efforts to ensure sustainable programming with a view to the transition from humanitarian service delivery to inclusion and self-reliance. It looked forward to continuing to support the Office in that endeavour to the benefit of refugees and their host communities.

7. The representative of **Nigeria** noted with concern that UNHCR had declared 43 emergencies in 29 countries in 2023 and that more than 122 million people had been displaced. Her delegation had taken note of the five focus areas highlighted in the Global Report and of the new impact area 5 on including forcibly displaced and stateless persons in economic growth and public service systems.

8. She commended the Office on its efforts to address heightened and complex humanitarian

challenges, which were often compounded by disinformation, misinformation, xenophobia, racial discrimination, human trafficking and other forms of inhumane treatment of those fleeing persecution, conflicts and natural disasters caused by climate change. She also welcomed the targeted support provided to older persons and persons with disabilities, who were often overlooked in displacement contexts.

9. Her Government had demonstrated its commitment to finding durable solutions for the refugees within its borders; providing them with access to housing, health care and education; ensuring their financial inclusion; and integrating them into national development plans. It welcomed the Office's support in that regard and urged other Member States and global partners to step up their efforts to address the root causes of displacement and fulfil the over 1,700 pledges made at the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

10. In light of the 48 per cent deficit in the 2023 budget and the resulting difficulties in implementing programmes in many countries, she called on UNHCR to ensure the equitable distribution of agreed resources during global crises, including by deepening partnerships and using unearmarked funding. Lastly, noting the prompt response to the security situation in West Africa in 2023, she urged the Office to continue to prioritize the protection of refugees through a routes-based approach.

11. The representative of **Australia** commended the Office on its comprehensive 2023 Global Trends report and on the enhanced transparency and reporting provided by the interactive website. Her Government was deeply concerned about the historic new levels of forced displacement and the unprecedented number of emergencies to which UNHCR had responded in 2023. The fact that 75 per cent of refugees resided in low- and middle-income countries underscored the critical need for more equitable global responsibility-sharing. She welcomed the new analysis showing how forcibly displaced persons were disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, which was a key concern for her region, and the progress in addressing gender-based violence in partnership with women-led organizations. The inclusion of sex- and age-disaggregated data was acknowledged although a more detailed analysis of age, gender and diversity considerations would be welcome.

12. In the face of increasing needs and a widening funding gap, it was important to find efficiencies by building partnerships with international financial institutions. Her Government appreciated the Office's long-standing collaboration with the World Bank in an effort to harness development assistance to the benefit of both refugees and their host communities and to develop better data. It supported the Office's continuing efforts to leverage that collaboration in order to assist host communities and promote refugee self-reliance through accessible funding instruments and welcomed the Bank's World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Society.

13. Beyond a principled approach, the humanitarian system must ensure that it reached those most in need. She therefore welcomed the Office's cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Member States and others in that regard. Increased visibility and understanding were fundamental to progress towards safe and durable solutions for all refugees.

14. The representative of **Uganda** thanked the Office for the user-friendly format and disaggregated data of the 2023 Global Report. It was painfully clear that despite the much-appreciated efforts to involve the private sector, the names of and statistics on the donors and host countries that bore the brunt of burden-sharing were unchanged since the previous edition; she appealed to the "missing middle" to join their efforts.

15. The Director of the Division of Strategic Planning and Results had drawn attention to the allocation of 39,000 acres of arable land to refugee households in Uganda as an example of good practice in empowering communities and achieving gender equality. Yet, Uganda had not been included among the largest allocations despite being a least developed country struggling with its own social and economic difficulties. While appreciating that funding had been earmarked by partners for other purposes, she would like to know how UNHCR was addressing that issue. Regarding the land allocation, her Government was proud of its effort to enhance refugees' self-reliance, which needed to be reported under impact area 3, and called for more to be done to find solutions that would empower refugees and turn them into agents of development, thereby reducing the continued appeals for support.

16. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that with the new record of over 120 million displaced persons driving humanitarian needs to new heights and in light of the number

and magnitude of ongoing conflicts, it was easy to despair. The Global Report showed the continued need for the Office's engagement and the paramount nature of its mandate. The more detailed reporting on outcomes was a great improvement; the presentation of trends, targets and results was more user-friendly; and the performance data was better integrated. He hoped, however, that future editions of the Report would include more information on the donors and use of unearmarked funding.

17. As seen from its commitments at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, his Government remained committed to bridging the funding gap with unearmarked contributions and urged the "missing middle" to join it in enhancing burden- and responsibility-sharing and supporting solutions. As humanitarian funding continued to decline, UNHCR should continue to pursue prioritization and efficiencies by consolidating small-scale operations and reducing the number of parallel humanitarian systems as recommended by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and should keep Member States informed of those efforts and the underlying principles.

18. On the Office's expenditure in 2023, he welcomed the breakdown by impact area but noted that spending on solutions was still highly underfunded. While that should be seen against the backdrop of substantial cuts in other areas, securing solutions was integral to the Global Compact on Refugees and required a better collective effort with a focus on the routes-based approach. His Government remained committed to the nexus approach, as shown by its continued engagement through the Partnership for improving prospects for host communities and forcibly displaced persons (PROSPECTS).

19. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that her Government objected to the references to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a refugee-producing country in the 2023 Global Report. The recent migratory flow had been caused not by armed conflict or persecution, but by the devastating financial and economic impacts of coercive measures imposed unilaterally in violation of international law. The many Venezuelans who, owing to restricted access to essential goods, services and financial resources, had been driven to seek a better life abroad could not be described as "refugees" under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR continued to make no distinction between the two internationally recognized terms, "refugees" and "migrants", and to allocate critical resources to countries receiving the latter rather than to those hosting the former. Her Government reiterated its call for the Office to respect that distinction so as to prevent the conditional, mercantilist or politicized processing of claims.

20. Her Government also reiterated its objection to the inclusion in the Refugee Olympic Team of a Venezuelan national who did not meet the international criteria for classification as a refugee. While it was important to embrace inclusive policies in sport for all those displaced by persecution and war, the principles of international refugee law, namely impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity and non-politicization, must be respected in addressing the issues inherent in the Office's mandate. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela stood ready to continue to work with UNHCR on the basis of dialogue and cooperation.

21. The Observer for **Cuba** said that, as reflected in the Global Report, the Standing Committee was meeting at a deeply troubling time for international protection. He drew attention to the 5.9 million people who had fled the genocide in Gaza and had been prevented from receiving urgently needed humanitarian assistance transiting through Israel.

22. With the 2024 Olympic Games about to open in Paris, the noble cause of Olympism had been shamefully exploited for political purposes by Western countries. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and UNHCR were colluding in manipulation of the definition of the term "refugee", the theft of sporting talent and distortion of the Olympic ideal by including in the 2024 Refugee Olympic Team two athletes of Cuban origin who had not been displaced by war or persecution. Granting refugee status to persons who did not qualify undermined the spirit of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and had an impact on people who were actually in need of refuge; the fact that no Palestinian athletes had been included in the team was proof of its politicization. The use of asylum proceedings to regularize the status of people whose real goal was economic migration was disrespectful to refugees.

23. Greater clarity and accountability regarding the Office's collaboration with the IOC and other international entities and greater transparency in the work of the Olympic Refugee Foundation, of which the High Commissioner was currently Vice-President, were needed. The fact that only three of the 36 athletes on the 2024 Refugee Olympic Team resided in developing countries reflected an

unequal and political distribution of the scholarships granted through the Foundation. His Government held UNHCR responsible for endorsing the classification of high-performing athletes as refugees when they did not qualify for that status and the IOC for including them in the team in a political manoeuvre that violated the Olympic Charter. Funding and efforts to ensure international protection should focus on people in genuine need without exclusion, distortion, politicization or favouritism.

(c) **Private sector fundraising** (EC/75/SC/CRP.12)

24. The **Director of the Division of External Relations** (UNHCR), accompanying her remarks with a PowerPoint presentation, said that UNHCR had seen a more than five-fold increase in annual contributions from the private sector over the past decade: from \$111 million in 2011 to \$625 million in 2021. The private sector was now the Office's second largest source of unearmarked funding, accounting for 39 per cent of its total income. The Office had received a record \$1.2 billion – 20 per cent of its total income – from the private sector in 2022, largely as a result of the outpouring of generosity in response to the war in Ukraine. According to a peer review and performance analysis, UNHCR had been the first humanitarian agency to have reached the \$1 billion milestone, 17 years after it had first started to invest in its private sector fundraising team in the mid-2000s; the next-best-performing agency, Doctors without Borders, had taken 34 years to reach that milestone.

25. The Office's approach to private sector fundraising was ambitious, strategic and data-driven. In 2023, 48 per cent of those funds had come from Europe, 24 per cent from Asia and 17 per cent from the Americas with the highest growth rate between 2020 and 2023 in the Americas and Europe (75 and 61 per cent, respectively), and there was an enormous potential for further growth. In Africa, the Office had reached a major milestone by securing a \$25 million contribution from the MasterCard Foundation to support its operations in the Sudan situation and the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme for the next three years.

26. Individual donors were a key driver of sustainable, predictable income growth and the figures reflected a commitment to refugees on the part of millions of individuals. An overall decrease in 2023 – from 92 to \$85 million in Spain, from 84 to \$59 million in Japan, from 48 to \$22 million in Sweden and from 46 to \$35 million in Germany with the figures for the Republic of Korea unchanged at \$45 million – could be attributed to the fact that the Office had not been involved in the response to the Gaza crisis and to a natural decline after an unprecedented rise in 2022. Total income, however, had increased and the Office aimed to capitalize on the real potential for growth through continued investment.

27. The Office's strategy for communicating with potential donors and building trust differed from one country to another. Its brand equity research had shown that an increase in contributions from individual donors went hand in hand with an increased awareness of its work, which in turn fostered greater solidarity with refugees and displaced persons. Investment in awareness-raising campaigns would raise the Office's profile.

28. The outcomes of the ongoing analysis of the Office's performance levels against those of 22 peer organizations and agencies – with which it was not in competition but remained in communication and shared lessons learned – were encouraging. While following the same general trend as its peers, its total private sector income had grown by 32 per cent over the period 2021–2023 as compared with 19 per cent for Doctors without Borders and 8 per cent for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). UNHCR and its 22 peers had achieved an average of 5 per cent growth during that period with an increase of 101 per cent in 2022 as compared with 20 per cent for the rest of the market. That success confirmed the potential of private sector investment and the trend towards diversification.

29. Turning to the way forward, she said that the key goals for 2024 included raising \$750 million in total income and \$300 million in unearmarked funding from the private sector and achieving 20 million supporters and 3.8 million individual donors. Given the growing funding gap and the increasing number of displaced persons in need of assistance, the Office's new private sector engagement strategy aimed to increase its annual income from private sources to \$2 billion by 2033. To that end, the strategy would take on a new approach to partnership that focused not only on securing income from supporters, but also on using their influence and expertise to provide solutions for people who had been forced to flee. That approach was already visible in much of the Office's work with major private sector partners such as the IKEA Foundation, UNIQLO and Fast Retailing, whose stores employed refugees and gave them a voice in order to raise awareness of the refugee

cause. In Japan, for example, UNIQLO staff went into schools to speak about refugee issues, internal displacement and statelessness.

30. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, more than 110 private sector pledges had been made; over 20 partners had pledged over \$1 million; and there had been many more pledges for advocacy, assets, products, services, mentoring and skills development. Other channels for growth that the Office hoped to prioritize were One United Nations Foundation; legacy gifts, which it planned to make a mainstream channel across its Private Sector Partnerships Service and national partners; and private philanthropy across its five regions.

31. Another key area was the development of longer-term partnerships with new donors who provided support during an emergency. For example, donors to the 2020 Winter Campaign for refugees and internally displaced persons in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic had also supported the Office's response to the Ukraine emergency and to the earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye. The DAFI/Aiming Higher Programme (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) campaign, which had already exceeded its target of 15 per cent enrolment of refugees in tertiary education by 2030, had raised \$25 million to fund over 1,900 scholarships since its launch in 2020; the Office's food and climate campaign had raised more than \$27 million from individuals and the private sector in 2023; and the annual Ramadan campaign had raised a record \$46 million for nearly 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons in 23 countries.

32. As for how Member States could support the Office's private sector fundraising efforts, governments could offer tax breaks for individuals and companies that made financial contributions; support the joint initiative with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to include refugees in labour markets and ensure their access to financial services; use their development agencies to team up with companies in support of refugee inclusion in low- and middle-income host countries; and encourage companies to hire refugees, including at their overseas subsidiaries in major refugee-hosting countries.

33. The representative of **Uganda**, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that she welcomed the update on the Office's efforts to mobilize resources, particularly unearmarked funding that had been channelled into protracted displacement and other emerging crises, through engagement with the private sector. She commended private donors for the unprecedented \$1.2 billion in contributions and for becoming a major source of unearmarked funding and welcomed the Office's efforts to develop a new strategy with an innovative, long-term vision for both financial and non-financial private sector engagement. In light of the work already under way in other regions, she requested more information on the extent of such engagement in Africa.

34. The African Group recognized the importance of the private sector in developing and implementing durable solutions by facilitating access to labour markets, contributing to skills development and building sustainable enterprises. It encouraged UNHCR to pursue collaboration at the local level, taking advantage of established national dialogue platforms. It appreciated the in-kind and other forms of support provided by private sector actors in some African countries and hoped that the Office would consider leveraging such initiatives at the national level.

35. The increase in private sector pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, from \$280 million in 2019 to over \$500 million in 2023, was encouraging but a pledge was only as good as its implementation. The African Group remained hopeful that those pledges would be implemented so that UNHCR could respond to the most urgent situations.

36. The representative of **Zimbabwe** said that she welcomed the steady growth in private sector contributions since 2011, especially since the majority had been provided as unearmarked funding that gave UNHCR greater flexibility in responding to emergencies. Her Government called on new and traditional donors alike to step up their support for host countries, which could not choose whom to assist and must respond to all those in need of protection and life-saving interventions. She commended the Office on its current resource mobilization strategy and encouraged it to intensify efforts at the national level as well.

37. Her Government welcomed collaboration with the private sector and appreciated the financial and in-kind assistance that it provided. In the Tongogara refugee settlement, 60 households had benefitted from support received from the Green Fuel Corporation, which had been assisting in the rehabilitation of roads, environmental management and land clearance for the construction of a safe "green market". Other private sector actors – including, among others, Allied Timbers, Delta,

Mukuru, Pepsi, Profits and SEDCO, were also providing services to the refugee community and those synergies needed to be strengthened.

38. The representative of **Kenya** stressed the importance of whole-of-society engagement and thanked Kenyan and other private sector donors for the generous contributions that made the Office's life-saving work possible. In addition to enhancing refugee self-reliance, it was important to consider the added value of the private sector in addressing the four objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. Bolstering private sector engagement in countries of origin was crucial to the return and reintegration of refugees and an update on the Office's work in that area would be appreciated.

39. The 2019 IFC report entitled "Generating Private Investment in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Areas" noted that the private sector's role in breaking the cycle of conflict, fragility and poverty throughout the development process was increasingly seen as essential, as recognized in the g7+ New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. UNHCR should seek to strengthen its engagement with IFC and other development finance institutions in order to achieve growth, create jobs and improve stability in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

40. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, her Government had announced national pledges related to the Shirika Plan for refugees and host communities, which covered registration and documentation, health care, social protection, planning and the provision of services. It had undertaken to address statelessness and education and had joined the multi-stakeholder pledges on climate action, economic inclusion, education, health, sports, human settlements, resettlement and complementary pathways, peacebuilding and conflict resolution. She thanked the partners that had matched some of those pledges and urged private sector entities and others to participate in their implementation. Private sector engagement was also crucial to implementation of the Plan in areas such as education, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and nutrition, livelihoods and self-reliance, social protection, environmental management, energy, agriculture, housing and land.

41. She requested the Office to share with Member States the information provided on its new private sector engagement strategy. Additional information on the Refugee Environmental Protection Fund and the Climate Resilience Fund for refugees, including the potential benefits for long-standing host countries affected by the impact of climate change and environmental degradation in refugee-hosting areas, would also be welcome. She commended the DAFI/Aiming Higher campaign for increasing refugee enrolment in tertiary education and looked forward to further updates.

42. The representative of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** said that he welcomed the growth in private sector funding since the eighty-ninth meeting of the Standing Committee. In light of the broader private sector fundraising goals, he would appreciate the Office's reflections on the reduction of over \$500 million in private sector income between 2022 and 2023. He asked to what extent UNHCR saw private sector fundraising as dependent on media coverage and how much control it had over that and other influential factors. It would also be useful to know how the Office had decided on the ambitious new goal of raising \$2 billion from the private sector annually by 2030 and which year's numbers had been taken as a baseline.

43. The representative of **Switzerland** expressed his appreciation for the Global Report, which showed both the growing importance of private sector funding for UNHCR and the ways in which it could benefit from working with private sector actors. Although specific campaigns could more easily generate funds, flexibility in the use of resources was an asset worth maintaining and the Office should learn from the outcomes of different approaches. Giving an example of the non-governmental organization (NGO), Spain for UNHCR, which had been more successful than those in other more populous and wealthy industrialized countries, he encouraged the Office to learn what factors had contributed to its success, how other national organizations could replicate those factors and what was preventing the creation of "for UNHCR" organizations in other countries with significant potential. In that connection, he asked why the Swiss private sector's contribution in 2023 had not been included in the Director's presentation.

44. The report demonstrated the value of practical cooperation on the ground and of involving the private sector in more environmentally-friendly solutions. His Government supported the Geneva Technical Hub and the Digital Hub on Treasury Solutions and planned to proceed along the same lines in its development initiatives to see how best to integrate the private and the finance and technology sectors. Switzerland planned to assign additional experts to encourage the Office's non-financial collaboration with the private sector and support its engagement strategy, particularly at

the regional level.

45. The representative of the **United States of America** said that the global community recognized the importance of entrepreneurship, private investment and market-driven solutions for long-term humanitarian and development outcomes. At the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, her Government had joined the World Economic Forum's Humanitarian and Resilience Investing Initiative, which called for the mobilization of \$10 billion in investment capital by 2030 for fragile frontier markets, including refugee-hosting areas.

46. The Kenyan Government, United States government agencies, and partners such as IFC, the IKEA Foundation and the World Bank were cooperating in the development of assistance investment portfolios in northern Kenya with a view to transforming protracted humanitarian situations into sustainable ones through private sector investment and increasing the resilience and self-reliance of both refugees and local populations. Her Government aimed to expand such cooperation to nine additional frontier markets by 2030. It supported the IFC-UNHCR joint initiative to promote private sector solutions in refugee-hosting areas and looked forward to continuing and expanding those efforts with the Office, together with hosts and donors, to create lasting economic opportunities.

47. The **Director of the Division of External Relations** (UNHCR), replying to the question on the extent of the Office's engagement with the private sector in Africa, said that in addition to its collaboration with the Mastercard Foundation, private sector partnership forums had been organized in Rwanda in 2021 and in Ghana in 2023 in partnership with an African-led initiative, the Amahoro Coalition, which offered mentorship programmes that provided economic opportunities for the inclusion of displaced persons. Another forum would be organized in 2025 in an as-yet-to-be-determined country. UNHCR had also collaborated with the Safaricom and Vodafone telecommunications corporations. In Uganda, she had met with the private sector and with Ugandan entrepreneurs who had themselves been refugees in South Sudan and wished to give back by offering employment opportunities. She encouraged Member States to inform the Office of any other initiatives or entrepreneurs with an interest in partnerships.

48. Switzerland's contribution had not been mentioned in her presentation because the slide in question showed only income from individual regular donors, which tended to be unearmarked. The contributions to which the representative of Switzerland had referred would fall under the category of corporations, foundations or the private sector and were generally earmarked.

49. In reply to the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, she said that contributions increased when media interest in a country grew and the opposite was also true; for example, when media interest in the Sudan situation had waned recently, there had been a decrease in contributions and interest from the private sector. She would explain how the Office had decided on the \$2 billion target later as she did not have the complex figures to hand.

3. International Protection

50. The **Assistant High Commissioner for Protection** (UNHCR) said that there were currently 17 active emergencies declared by UNHCR and 32 countries were deemed at high risk of emergency.

51. In the Sudan, sexual violence was rife and there were reports of suicides among the survivors and grave violations against children. In Darfur, civilians were being killed based on their ethnicity and skin colour. The country had the largest number of internally displaced people globally – 9.4 million people – and around 2 million people had fled to neighbouring countries. She called on other States in the region and beyond to respond to the international protection needs of the Sudanese refugees and to support the communities hosting them.

52. The conflict in Myanmar had intensified and spread across several regions. Bombing campaigns, executions and detentions had pushed another 1.6 million people to flee, over 3 million people were internally displaced and thousands more had fled the country.

53. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 700,000 people had been newly displaced, bringing the total to an all-time high of 7.2 million. Violations against children, including sexual crimes, abductions and forced recruitments, were committed with impunity. The eastern part of country was one of the most dangerous places in the world for women and girls; insufficient aid had left them easy prey for armed groups as they went in search of income and of firewood for cooking.

54. In its third year, the war in Ukraine had grown more entrenched. Assaults on cities had destroyed homes, schools and businesses and thousands of people had been evacuated or forced to flee. In Gaza, more than 37,000 people had been killed and over 85,000 injured, nearly 21,000 children were missing and an estimated 1.2 million Palestinians in the enclave were displaced. While the population struggled on the verge of famine, trucks filled with food and life-saving aid were obstructed from reaching those who needed it most.

55. Climate impacts and disasters were additional factors in displacement. At the end of 2023, almost three quarters of the world's forcibly displaced persons were living in climatically vulnerable countries. Elsewhere, violence, crime and instability had left people with no option but to flee. In Haiti, escalating gang violence had reached alarming levels, unleashing a pervasive environment of fear and limiting access to essential services; nearly 600,000 people had left their homes in 2023, more than double the number for 2022.

56. Violence, conflict and climate continued to drive record levels of displacement. With solutions in short supply, dialogue among States had become increasingly polarized or even deadlocked and even when warring parties and their allies reached agreement, implementation remained a challenge. In 2023, the much-sought-after solution – safe, dignified and voluntary return to places of origin – had been largely out of reach. Globally, just over 1 million refugees had been repatriated, a decline from 1.3 million in 2022, and four out of five of those returnees were Ukrainian or South Sudanese. Over half a million refugees, most of them in flight from the Sudan, had returned to South Sudan, where conditions for living in safety and dignity might not be sustainable. The number of people returning from internal displacement had fallen by 39 per cent to 5.1 million; over 50 million children had been forcibly displaced; and gender-based violence had been the top protection risk reported in over 30 emergencies. Persons with disabilities, older persons and other marginalized groups had continued to be neglected and cut off from services.

57. Humanitarian work was rooted in an ethic and practice of solidarity and cooperation; indeed, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees recognized cooperation as crucial in addressing refugee displacement. With over 80 elections taking place in 2024, migration and asylum had become a hot electoral topic. Political expediency, coupled with sensational and inaccurate media coverage, was paving the way for misinformation, xenophobia, hate speech and violence. Refugees and asylum-seekers were scapegoated as the cause of social ills, unemployment, insecurity and health crises; disdain for core values that were essential for international protection – the rule of law, pluralism and multilateralism – was growing; and there was backsliding on core protection principles and rights, including threats to the principles established to protect asylum-seekers, rollbacks on gender equality and non-discrimination, and undue pressure on civil society.

58. It was deeply concerning that some States were limiting access to their territory through, among other things, draconian legislation that restricted asylum. Deterrence and securitized border management were becoming more prevalent, together with pushbacks and violence at land and sea borders. Significant refolement incidents had been reported and some States were even criminalizing solidarity and repressing non-governmental actors involved in rescue and life-saving activities. Those measures endangered the international protection system and undermined the right to seek asylum, placing vulnerable people at risk of mistreatment or refolement and leading States to avoid and shift, rather than share, responsibility. With few options for safe, regular pathways, refugees and asylum-seekers were resorting to irregular means of travel along hazardous routes shared by migrants and using smugglers or traffickers. The collective failure to put in place sustainable protection and solutions was placing the management of human mobility in the hands of criminal networks.

59. Asylum was a fundamental right, rooted in international refugee law and a shared humanity, and granting asylum to refugees was an international obligation. While exercising their sovereign right to manage their borders, States must also uphold human rights and international laws, including the customary law principle of non-refoulement; they could not pursue policies that violated long-established laws and principles and expect others to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility. UNHCR was committed to working with governments and partners to improve the efficacy of asylum systems, bolster protection and find sustainable solutions. She urged Member States and partners to recommit to doing more, and to doing better.

60. Turning to encouraging developments, she thanked the States and communities that had kept their doors open to those who were forced to flee. For decades, the governments and people of Colombia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya, Pakistan, Türkiye, Uganda and many other countries

had hosted large numbers of refugees. Their solidarity was to be commended, but their burden must be shared. The countries showing the most generosity towards refugees were consistently those that were struggling with economic and political challenges.

61. In 2023, despite the challenges, more countries had aligned their legal frameworks with the international refugee instruments and statelessness conventions than in 2022. Courts, judges and lawyers worldwide had expressed appreciation for cooperation with and contributions from the Office as *amicus curiae* to their proceedings. The international legal framework for combating statelessness had also advanced in 2023 and 2024; the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tome and Principe had become States parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and in June 2024, Cameroon had adopted a bill authorizing accession to both Conventions. Those successes were due in part to targeted advocacy by UNHCR and its partners, including women's rights organizations, which had been key allies in addressing gender discrimination in nationality laws. Since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014, more than half a million people had acquired a nationality: in 2023, over 32,000 people had had their nationality confirmed or been granted citizenship and 2024 would culminate in the launch of the new Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

62. She was encouraged by the fact that over 155,000 refugees had been submitted for resettlement in 2023 and a record 96,000 had departed to countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States of America. With an estimated 2 million refugees in need of resettlement, those efforts must be scaled up. The growing engagement of development actors, including financial institutions, which were increasingly facilitating the inclusion and protection of refugees in national services and economies and providing fresh ideas and new funding to support host States, were also welcome. There had been progress in facilitating the meaningful participation of the populations that UNHCR served and in shaping and delivering on policy and programme priorities. The Office had also supported community-based protection initiatives; in 2023, it had worked with 850 local and community-based NGOs, some of them led by forcibly displaced or stateless persons, women, young people or people with disabilities.

63. Over the past two years, UNHCR had also facilitated the participation of refugees and stateless persons in key decision-making and high-level venues such as the Global Refugee Forum 2023. At a time of division and polarization, that event was a hopeful reminder of what collective action could achieve and a way forward for further protection, inclusion, self-reliance and solutions for forcibly displaced people and host communities. The task now was to keep that momentum going and move from words to action. She was encouraged by the progress in implementation of the pledges made at the Forum. In preparation for the High-Level Officials Meeting in 2025, those successes should be supported and accelerated.

64. After 35 years of working to uphold and advance the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless persons, she had no illusions about what needed to be done. UNHCR had at its disposal important treaties, laws and policies that States had crafted and to which they had committed, as well as agreement on important declarations of principles and values and a toolbox of innovative, strategic approaches. It was time to move forward collectively while focusing on the challenges.

(a) Note on international protection (EC/75/SC/CRP.13)

65. The **Director of the Division of International Protection** (UNHCR) said that the 2024 note on international protection highlighted the need to abide by international legal standards and fulfil the commitments made in the Global Compact on Refugees. The challenges of ensuring protection and solutions for forcibly displaced people were compounded during mixed movements involving both refugees and migrants and in contexts impacted by climate change and disaster. The note recalled the relevance of the Office's core protection mandate to contemporary displacement challenges and the importance of partnerships in addressing their magnitude and complexity. It was a crucial responsibility of States, partners and other stakeholders to leverage the Office's leadership role and recognize the full scope of refugee definitions and human rights as they applied to the protection of displaced and stateless persons.

66. With too few political solutions to ongoing and new conflicts, protection needs had grown exponentially over the past year. Life-saving needs must be prioritized in the short term, but funding cuts could affect longer-term strategies and community-based and resilience-building activities, jeopardizing prospects for inclusion in national systems and economies. Development investments benefiting both displaced and host communities should be made more swiftly, widely and

systematically available. Many States had strengthened the capacity of their asylum systems by developing fair and efficient procedures, including the use of prima facie approaches or temporary protection schemes and the use of digital technology for registration and documentation.

67. Courts around the world had continued to hand down important decisions upholding the rights of displaced and stateless persons and adhering to UNHCR guidance. However, collective international efforts to safeguard the right to asylum and achieve protection and solutions were being undermined by restrictive policies and practices such as refoulement, arbitrary expulsions, mass deportations, large-scale pushbacks, non-entry measures at borders and attempts to shift protection responsibilities. Also worrisome were reports of asylum-seekers who faced legal and practical barriers to protection, such as lack of access to asylum systems and discrimination.

68. When protection and solutions were not realized and rights were inaccessible, forcibly displaced and stateless persons might feel compelled to undertake dangerous journeys that exposed them to heightened protection risks. In response to the challenges of mixed and onward movements, a route-based approach could provide a way forward through a comprehensive set of humanitarian and development solutions and rights-based interventions by States, UNHCR, IOM and others in countries of origin, asylum, transit and destination. Such an approach would help refugees and migrants to access protection and assistance, solutions and legal pathways at the earliest possible stage and would allow States along the routes to manage mixed and onward movements in an efficient, effective and lawful manner based on the collaboration and responsibility-sharing that underpinned the Global Compact on Refugees.

69. Building on the progress achieved, the High Commissioner had emphasized the need to move towards the wider inclusion of displaced and stateless persons in national systems and services by linking efforts for refugees and host countries to the humanitarian, development and peace nexus and the responsibility-sharing imperative.

70. Turning to key operational developments, she said that child protection in displacement situations had been strengthened. Specialized child protection services had been established and age-appropriate information provided to children about their rights, the available services and opportunities to make their voices heard and influence decisions affecting them.

71. Gender-based violence remained a major concern. With one in five refugee women subjected to sexual violence, UNHCR was working with its partners to strengthen national prevention and response systems and had deployed its expertise from the onset of numerous emergencies.

72. The Office, which had repeatedly expressed concern at the insufficiency of solutions to displacement, called for additional support for governments' efforts to create conducive conditions for sustainable and voluntary reintegration. Despite the expansion of resettlement opportunities and complementary pathways, thanks in part to the catalytic effect of the Global Refugee Forum pledging process, greater efforts were needed so that refugees could benefit from third-country solutions. Countries were called upon to offer more resettlement places and to scale up complementary pathways, including facilitated access to skills-based, humanitarian and sponsorship schemes and family reunification. States, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations, including those led by refugees and displaced persons, should be included in the pursuit of protection and solutions through strategic partnerships.

73. The Observer for the **European Union**, speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, said that there was growing pressure on asylum systems, including within the European Union; in 2023, 1.1 million people had applied for international protection, the highest figure in seven years. Its member States had granted protection to almost 400,000 asylum-seekers and were providing temporary protection to almost 4.2 million people who had fled the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, 80 per cent of them women and children. That protection had been extended for another year, until March 2026.

74. The European Union welcomed the pledges made by host countries at the Global Refugee Forum 2023. It commended the States that had improved their asylum and migration systems and would continue to support such efforts. Its Pact on Migration and Asylum would modernize those systems in compliance with international law and with due attention to specific vulnerabilities, in accordance with the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. It would introduce safe and predictable arrival procedures, faster processes at external borders and more effective asylum and return procedures with a focus on the most vulnerable, particularly migrants and families with

children. He looked forward to the Office's continued cooperation in the implementation of the Pact.

75. Welcoming the joint work of the Office and IOM regarding mixed movements of migrants and refugees, he stressed the importance of whole-of-route, rights-based and comprehensive approaches and coordination between actors in order to protect the fundamental rights of refugees and migrants and ensure the return of those not in need of international protection. The European Union stood ready to support the development and implementation of that approach with partner countries, the United Nations and other stakeholders.

76. In the European Union, refugees had access to labour markets and social welfare benefits. Funding tools such as the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the European Social Fund supported its members' efforts in key sectors such as education, employment, housing and health care. He commended the partner countries that were pursuing progressive refugee inclusion policies to the benefit of both refugees and host communities.

77. The European Union and its member States continued to offer safe, legal pathways to protection through resettlement programmes that had helped over 120,000 refugees and facilitated almost 48,000 humanitarian admissions. They had collectively pledged to offer 61,000 places for resettlement and humanitarian admissions combined in 2024–2025 and were contributing to efforts to promote complementary pathways to protection and community sponsorship. In that connection, he called on other countries to provide for resettlement. He looked forward to the adoption of the Executive Committee's conclusions on durable solutions and complementary pathways and to the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness during the October 2024 session of the Executive Committee.

78. The representative of **Pakistan**, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), recalled that over half of the world's refugees were hosted in OIC member States and that several of its other members were donors or countries of origin or transit and thus had a major stake in the Office's work. She commended the Office's efforts to promote partnerships for equitable burden- and responsibility- sharing for refugees and urged the international community to commit to additional flexible and unearmarked funding, including through grant-based and concessional financing tools. Because voluntary repatriation to countries of origin was the solution preferred by most refugees, it was important to help countries of origin to create the necessary conditions for sustainable return and to support pathways for admission to third countries.

79. The OIC deplored the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and reiterated its call for an immediate ceasefire, access to humanitarian aid and lifting of the unjust siege on the occupied Palestinian territories. Recognizing that the Office did not have a mandate to respond to the needs of Palestinian refugees, she called on the international community to support the work of the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA).

80. The 2024 Regional Response Plan for the Sudan, where 10 million people had been displaced in just 14 months, remained seriously underfunded. She urged the Office, donors and other international partners to increase funding for the Plan and to improve the efficiency of resource allocation.

81. The OIC said that the wording used in paragraph 12 of the note on international protection appeared to convey a negative judgement on certain Member States that had no tenable basis in international law and did not reflect the usage of all Member States. At the eighty-seventh meeting of the Standing Committee, the OIC had engaged in dialogue in an effort to resolve the contentious use of sexual orientation and gender identity terminology in UNHCR documents, as a result of which a disclaimer clarifying that the note did "not necessarily represent the views of all member States of the Executive Committee" (EC/74/SC/CRP.11, para. 3) had been added. She emphasized the need for continued dialogue among all members of the Executive Committee in an effort to reach an understanding on controversial issues.

82. The representative of **the Republic of the Congo**, speaking on behalf of the African Union, said that in light of the current funding gap, it was crucial for donors to increase their contributions, make multi-year commitments, provide flexible funds, establish innovative funding mechanisms and improve coordination in order to support durable long-term solutions for refugees and displaced persons in Africa.

83. The African Union echoed the Office's call for States to ensure access to protection for those seeking it and to fulfil their commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees. Africa hosted the

largest number of displaced persons of any region and the humanitarian situation in some of its countries might worsen if international cooperation was not improved. Most of the African States had engaged in dialogue in an effort to find joint solutions, learn from each other, raise awareness among their citizens and promote tolerance and inclusion. He called on the Office to look into non-traditional solutions in third countries, including resettlement, family reunification and access to higher education and vocational training.

84. The representative of **Jordan** said that his country was hosting millions of Syrian refugees, only 10 per cent of whom were in camps. The reduction in funding for programmes and international assistance was increasing the burden on his Government, which was committed to providing them with basic services, education and health care, and was affecting development in the country. He emphasized the importance of funding for repatriation and resettlement programs and of a solution to the Syrian crisis. Donors should respond to humanitarian crises in a proportional and balanced way; it seemed that some refugees were at the top of the list and others at the bottom under certain programmes.

85. Lastly, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza had caused untold suffering for civilians, most of them women and children. It was therefore important for UNRWA to receive the necessary support.

86. The representative of **Norway** drew attention to the alarming increase in forcibly displaced persons, primarily as a result of conflicts. The restrictions on humanitarian access and failure to respect international humanitarian law in the Sudan were of great concern. In light of the funding gap, he urged humanitarian, development and peace actors to find new ways of working together and to include in their initiatives the protection of people affected by conflict and crisis. He applauded the partnership between the Office, the World Bank, IOM and other development agencies regarding mixed migration flows.

87. He thanked host countries for their generosity and said that, in part to help alleviate that burden, Norway provided the Office with unearmarked funding. It would continue its efforts to resettle refugees and called on other countries to follow suit. His Government welcomed the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum and would be bound by some of its regulations.

88. In May 2024, his Government had launched a new humanitarian strategy, which stated that the protection of civilians remained a key priority with a focus on combatting sexual and gender-based violence and protecting children, young people, refugees and internally displaced persons. Its Action Plan on Gender and Sexual Diversity (2023–2026) called for equal treatment, non-discrimination, tailored protection and support in respect of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually or gender-diverse (LGBTIQ+) people under the Office's mandate.

89. The representative of **Nigeria** said that the Office should restructure its financial priorities as its funding deficit posed a serious threat to progress and to community-based and grassroots solutions. She was concerned at the increase in the global number of displaced persons and the many challenges faced by UNHCR staff, including exposure to dangerous situations, and commended their commitment to the international protection of vulnerable refugees. She welcomed the Office's use of digital tools to account for displaced people and the launch of its interactive refugee law and legislative framework and called on it to explore similar tools in order to promote dialogue on the fair implementation of international refugee law and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

90. She endorsed the collaboration with IOM in response to the increase in mixed movements of migrants and refugees. Her Government remained committed to ensuring the safe and dignified repatriation of Nigerian refugees and invited the Office and Member States to implement fair resettlement practices and promote complementary pathways for durable solutions. Nigeria was meeting its obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by opening its borders to persons of concern to UNHCR. She urged other Member States to implement fair asylum systems and refrain from the unlawful reform of practices and called on the Office to address the smuggling, trafficking in persons, sexual exploitation, racial discrimination and xenophobia encountered by refugees of African descent.

91. The representative of **Finland** said that his country remained a supporter of the Office and its mandate. He applauded its staff members' steadfast response to increasing protection needs, often at high personal risk; thanked the countries and communities that were hosting refugees; and commended the steps taken to promote refugee inclusion through equal access to educational and livelihood opportunities and formal employment. He welcomed the Office's efforts to find third

country solutions and encouraged more States to offer resettlement places, noting that Finland was a long-standing resettlement country.

92. In view of the resources gap, it was important to prioritize people in the most vulnerable situations. He thanked the Office for its work in addressing the barriers faced by people with disabilities, who accounted for 16 per cent of the world's population and a higher percentage in many conflict settings. He recognized the role of UNHCR as lead agency of the Global Protection Cluster and highlighted the intersection of international refugee law and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

93. Since the previous autumn, a hybrid operation at Finland's border had been exploiting people's vulnerable situation for political motives. His Government had since taken measures to address that problem. It was important to distinguish between asylum-seekers, migrants and victims of instrumentalized migration, each of whom required a different approach.

94. The representative of **Malta** expressed concern at the number of displaced persons and others who had been forced to leave their homes; the intersecting challenges of climate change, rising poverty, food insecurity and unequal access to resources; and the civilian suffering caused by the situations in Gaza, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Ukraine. Millions of displaced people from Ukraine were continuing to benefit from temporary protection and similar arrangements in the European Union, including Malta. She urged the parties to the conflict to facilitate full, rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian relief and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

95. She especially welcomed the age, gender and diversity approach in the Office's policies and interventions and its efforts to find durable solutions and complementary pathways for persons of concern. Noting the challenges faced by the European Union in the context of irregular migration, she welcomed the Office's work on a comprehensive, rights-focused, whole-of-route approach based on cooperation among States, IOM and other stakeholders.

96. Her Government was committed to the principles of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and to its obligations towards asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection under European Union law. Despite its small size, Malta had a robust framework for processing asylum claims in a timely and efficient manner and she thanked the Office for its collaboration in that regard. Malta's contributions to UNHCR during the current year had already surpassed the total amount from 2023 and were devoted to appeals, including for Ukraine, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. She hoped that the Office's assistance and cooperation with her country could be further strengthened.

97. The representative of **Mexico** expressed concern about the gap between the Office's rising assistance needs and the available resources and commended the measures taken in order to fulfil its mandate without compromising essential functions, including through non-traditional donors. In view of the increasing use of restrictive entry rules and practices such as forced expulsion, return and even violence, it was essential to find solutions that guaranteed access to refugee status determination procedures and to counter narratives based on disinformation and hate speech. She welcomed the note's focus on protection and non-discrimination and stressed the importance of combating sexual and gender-based violence and providing support to the victims.

98. Her country had benefited from the Office's tools for strengthening national asylum systems and she would appreciate additional information on how the new dashboard containing information on global legal protection for refugees and asylum-seekers, including data on refugee treaties and asylum laws, could be used to reinforce national policies.

99. Mexico was one of the five countries with the highest number of new refugee status applications, of which it had received 420,000 since 2021, and over 80,300 people had received international protection in the country. Her Government had adopted various legal and policy measures, including prohibition of the detention of migrant and asylum-seeking minors, cash assistance for people awaiting a decision on their refugee status applications, and a programme for the local integration of refugees that had given 36,000 people access to formal employment. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Mexico had made four national and four subnational pledges. Her Government also recognized the importance of regional cooperation and participated actively in the Cartagena+40 process, led by Chile.

100. The representative of **Guatemala** said that as a new member of the Executive Committee, he

reaffirmed his country's continued commitment to the protection and well-being of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants and to regional and international cooperation, as demonstrated by the meeting earlier in the year between the President of Guatemala, Bernardo Arévalo, and the High Commissioner. Noting Guatemala's complex situation as a country of origin, transit and destination, he emphasized the need for strengthened international cooperation and burden-sharing. Effective cooperation between his Government, UNHCR, local governments, governmental institutions and other key players had led to the implementation of best practices at the national level that had ensured access to protection without regard for nationality or mobility status.

101. At the Global Refugee Forum 2023, Guatemala had introduced a series of initiatives designed to reduce pressure on host countries, promote the self-sufficiency of refugees and support host communities, which reflected its dedication to implementing immediate and long-term strategies. Implementation of the Comprehensive Regional Framework for Protection and Solutions (MIRPS) had demonstrated the importance of durable and comprehensive solutions that met the needs of persons of interest and his Government had undertaken to promote their integration, expand the services provided and work with its regional and international partners.

102. His Government reaffirmed its commitment to intensifying efforts within the framework of the Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection. In May 2024, it had held a ministerial meeting, in which the High Commissioner had participated, with a view to increasing regional cooperation and coordination and strengthening joint strategies for addressing the challenges of migration and improving the protection of displaced persons.

103. He thanked the Office for the recent visits to Guatemala of, among others, the High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, which had strengthened cooperation with UNHCR in implementing policies and programmes for refugees and asylum-seekers and promoting durable and comprehensive solutions.

104. The representative of **Uruguay** said that his Government had adopted pioneering legislation promoting safe, orderly migration and mobility and a policy based on the principles of full respect for the rights of all migrants, equality of rights and treatment for nationals and foreign citizens, non-discrimination, social and cultural integration, respect for diversity and cultural identity, gender equality, and full protection of migrant groups in situations of vulnerability. Its national integration plan for migrants seeking refuge encouraged their contributions to development in the country.

105. World Refugee Day played a valuable role in promoting understanding and empathy towards refugees and displaced persons and their contributions to host societies. His Government had recently implemented a decree which established a settlement-based programme for asylum-seekers who did not meet the conditions for legal residency or did not wish to apply for it and affirmed the need to safeguard the rights of both migrants under national and international law.

106. The representative of **Ecuador** expressed concern at the millions of people who had been obliged to leave their homes as a result of violence, conflict, political oppression, discrimination and persecution and at States' reduced capacity to respond effectively to mixed migratory flows, comply with international standards and fulfil their pledges under the Global Compact. Multi-stakeholder alliances, including those presented at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, were essential in order to bridge funding gaps and increase host countries' capacity for international protection and for the inclusion of persons of interest to UNHCR.

107. The number of refugees in his country, most of them from Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was at a historic high. His Government was endeavouring to further strengthen its system for determining refugee status and statelessness; its border monitoring; and its conditions for registration, regularization and assistance within the framework of its Development Plan for the New Ecuador 2024–2025 and National Agenda for Equality in the Movement of Persons 2021–2025 and through mechanisms such as the National Round Table on the Movement of Persons.

108. UNHCR was providing his country with support on the ground and in coordination with other organizations in the search for durable solutions that facilitated the local integration of persons of interest, including through access to employment, training, and efforts to combat discrimination and xenophobia. Ecuador planned to join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness in October 2024 pursuant to its pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

109. The representative of **Canada** paid tribute to the generosity of host countries and encouraged UNHCR to continue its work with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in an effort to simplify its

protection architecture and bring its structural reforms into line with the larger humanitarian system reforms envisioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). She encouraged it to strengthen the implementation of its Age, Gender and Diversity Policy, including by facilitating the provision of gender-responsive humanitarian assistance and mainstreaming the specific and intersectional needs of women, girls, and persons who faced discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics.

110. In the context of the challenges inherent in mixed movements, the need for fair and efficient asylum systems and the opportunities afforded by multistakeholder partnerships, her Government would be investing CAD\$75 million over a six-year period to support capacity-building in origin, transit, and destination countries in the Americas. It was grateful for the support of its partners, including UNHCR, IOM, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and regional and national authorities.

111. Canada had resettled over 51,000 refugees, including at-risk women and girls, members of ethnic and religious minorities and human rights advocates from the Americas, in 2023. In addition to its commitments for Africa and the Middle East, it had made a new commitment for the Asia-Pacific region and would host 12,000 refugees from each of those regions over the next three years. Her Government facilitated family reunification in Canada, including under a new programme for people affected by the crisis in the Sudan. It continued to promote sponsorship pathways through the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and complementary pathways to durable solutions. In closing, she stressed the importance of implementing the Global Refugee Compact in order to support an international protection system that reflected the need for equitable burden-sharing.

112. The representative of the **Sudan** said that over the past 14 months, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had launched a war against the Sudanese State and its people. It had committed terrorist acts and war crimes such as attacking civilians, raping women and children and posting videos of those atrocities on social media in an attempt to intimidate people into evacuating their homes, which it then used as military barracks. It had also recruited refugees in the west of Darfur. Many people had been forced to move from Khartoum to Madani and then from Madani to other safe locations such as the city of Sinja. With the recent invasion of Sinja by the RSF, they had been displaced again, often to places where safety and shelter were uncertain. Thus, there was an urgent need for effective protection measures and durable solutions.

113. The alarming increase in the number of Sudanese people using smugglers to reach Europe or neighbouring countries was resulting in deaths in the desert and at sea. While appreciating the efforts of some States to receive people fleeing the situation in his country, he looked forward to better and more flexible conditions for their passage and hosting. In that regard, he called on States to observe the principles of the United Nations human rights instruments, including the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and to allow free passage of those affected by the conflict into their territory in dignity and without discrimination. He also called for the facilitation of regular migration routes and respect for the principle of non-refoulement.

114. The international community's response to appeals from his Government and humanitarian organizations remained very weak and as the militia continued to invade so-called "safe" states such as Al-Jazeera and Sennar and the cities of Singa and El Fasher, his country was close to famine. In that connection, he drew attention to Security Council Resolution No. 2736 (2024).

115. The Representative of **Colombia** said that Colombia was the third largest refugee-hosting country in the world, providing shelter to almost 3 million people. The number of refugees and migrants in the country had doubled in 2023, standing at 520,000, with a high percentage of them continuing northward across the Darien Gap. She thanked UNHCR and neighbouring States for their provision of assistance to people whose flight from armed conflict in their countries had put them at risk of trafficking in persons and endangered their lives, particularly in the case of women and girls. Colombia's coastal and border areas saw the highest levels of trafficking with 335 people rescued in 2023.

116. Her Government was offering safe and legal pathways to regularization for individuals in mixed movements in an effort to prevent them from traveling along the so-called "death routes". Building on the temporary protection permits granted to 2.3 million Venezuelans, it was issuing special residence permits to the legal guardians of the 270,000 Venezuelan children residing in the country and was launching a new digital platform for refugee applications with the support of UNHCR.

117. It operated refugee-hosting centres, processing and resettlement centres and three Safe Mobility centres, which processed asylum applications more quickly in order to facilitate onward travel towards the United States of America. However, those mechanisms must have international support in order to guarantee the coordinated delivery of protection. The Cartagena+40 action plan offered an ideal opportunity for cooperation with all relevant stakeholders in the search for alternative international solutions to address migratory flows and develop institutional and financial capacity for coordinated delivery.

118. The representative of **Bangladesh** commended the Office's new refugee treaty and legislation dashboard but expressed concern that the externalization arrangements between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Rwanda might undermine the right to seek and enjoy asylum and protection from refoulement. His country was experiencing further internal and cross-border displacement, triggered by climate change and conflicts, and his Government was grateful for the action taken by the Office to combat the negative campaigns against refugees on digital platforms that were worsening their situation worldwide. Those efforts should be coordinated with those of other United Nations agencies such as IOM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

119. Bangladesh was hosting 1.2 million Rohingya refugees from neighbouring Myanmar, a major undertaking, particularly in view of his country's resource constraints. Despite collaboration with UNHCR to ensure their safe temporary stay, the situation was posing a serious threat to regional and national security. No Rohingya had been able to return to Myanmar since 2017 and meaningful engagement between the Office, the Government of Myanmar and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was needed in order to reassure the Rohingyas in Bangladesh that they could return to Rakhine safely.

120. While voluntary repatriation was the best solution for refugee crises, he noted with concern that in 2023, over 1 million refugees had returned home without proper support from the international community. He therefore encouraged States to offer additional settlement places so that the Office's goal of achieving 1 million such places by 2030 could be achieved.

121. The representative of **Austria** said that he was concerned at the sharp increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide. His Government supported the notion of the centrality of protection, to be achieved through fair and efficient asylum systems. In 2024 to date, its asylum authorities had granted protection to 8,000 asylum-seekers and the country was hosting 113,000 displaced persons from Ukraine, of whom 38,000 had been provided with basic services.

122. Austria took gender equality and the need to protect women and girls extremely seriously. Its High Administrative Court had ruled that women who faced persecution in their countries of origin for rejecting forced marriage qualified as refugees under Article 1A(2) of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. There had also been progress in responding to gender-based violence and ensuring enjoyment of the right to sexual and reproductive health. He welcomed the Office's work in the areas of education and health and requested further details on its initiatives with respect to the protection and assistance needs of people with disabilities. He commended the Office's commitment to protecting the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless LGBTQI+ people and its efforts to end statelessness and appreciated the preparation of the Executive Committee's 2024 conclusion on durable solutions and complementary pathways.

123. The representative of **Australia** called for refugees to have a major voice in decisions affecting them and pressed for greater advocacy for protection of the most vulnerable among them, including LGBTQI+ people and people with disabilities. The Office's request for more States to offer additional settlement places was welcome, but increasingly flexible processing arrangements should also be adopted and obstacles to resettlement lifted in order to relieve pressure on host States.

124. Her Government was committed to the development of complementary pathways so that refugees could exercise self-agency, secure their own sustainable future and have their protection needs met. Accordingly, it had pledged AUD 2 million for the joint UNHCR-IOM project on access to safe labour pathways and looked forward to continued engagement with the Office through the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime and the updated Bali Process Toolkit for Inclusive Civil Registration.

125. She urged States to issue refugees with conventional travel documents enabling them to access complementary pathways and encouraged UNHCR to develop digital documentation and registration tools to facilitate that process. She paid tribute to the efforts of refugee-hosting States to

integrate refugees into their national systems and economies and called on the Office to continue its strategic partnerships with a view to their inclusion in national systems and economies.

126. The representative of **Denmark** said that rights-based, whole-route approaches were an essential component of collective international protection. Her Government looked forward to continuing to work with UNHCR and IOM on the development and implementation of those approaches and hoped to build on the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum by finding additional solutions to irregular migration that focused on comprehensive partnerships and were consistent with Denmark's obligations under international and European Union law.

127. Noting that most refugees were hosted in neighbouring States, she praised the generosity of host countries and reiterated her Government's commitment to supporting them in line with the principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing. It was important to strengthen the Office's continued partnerships with development actors, including the World Bank, and to build climate resilience and develop early warning systems in order to avert the displacement-related impacts of climate change. She welcomed the Office's commitment to addressing the issue of sexual and gender-based violence and promoting gender equality and stressed the importance of nexus approaches to the protection of internally displaced persons.

128. The representative of **Sweden** said that the record numbers of displaced persons and insufficient funding required the careful allocation of financial resources, underpinned by durable solutions that incorporated a rights-based approach and focussed primarily on protecting displaced populations. She thanked UNHCR for its constructive engagement in discussions on mixed movements and for guiding her country's efforts to build asylum capacity. While the mandatory solidarity mechanism established in the European Union Pact on Migration and Asylum would result in more efficient asylum processes, more must be done to deter people from undertaking dangerous journeys in search of protection. Her Government's key commitment in that area was its pledge at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, reaffirming its readiness to support asylum capacity in host countries.

129. While Sweden was proud to be one of the Office's top donors, its largest provider of unearmarked and multi-year funding and a long-standing resettlement country, far more States should be involved in resettlement schemes. Her Government remained committed to doing its part and was maintaining its annual quota of 900 refugees in 2024, giving priority to women, girls and LGBTIQ+ individuals and focussing on refugees from the Great Lakes region of Africa.

130. The representative of **Algeria** said that while the progress described in the note was encouraging, the number of people in need of protection and the unprecedented increase in crises and conflicts worldwide was worrying. His Government was concerned about the attacks on humanitarian workers in conflict areas and urged States to ensure their safety in accordance with Security Council resolution 2730 (2024) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

131. It was important to distinguish between different categories of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons, each of which had its own needs. In compliance with its international engagements, his Government was providing protection to all migrants and refugees in its territory. The Sahrawi refugees in particular were receiving free public health services delivered in coordination with the United Nations agencies, partners and NGOs. He urged the Office to make every effort to mobilize the funds required for full implementation of the Plan.

132. The representative of **Ethiopia** reaffirmed his country's determination to provide protection and assistance to refugees. His Government had made bold pledges at the Global Refugee Forum 2023 and, in collaboration with the World Bank, had launched a national digital identification project designed to integrate refugees and asylum-seekers into national systems so that they could access services. One of the pledges made at the Forum would provide access to clean and renewable energy, sustainable water supply, increased irrigable land, and health and education services to Somali refugees in the Melkadida camp; however, it remained underfunded.

133. His Government had adopted a prima facie approach to the granting of refugee status to Sudanese refugees in Addis Ababa and was automatically renewing their visas. Since the start of the wars in their respective countries, 230,000 Somali and Sudanese refugees had entered Ethiopia and the resilience of host communities was being affected by weather events such as flooding. Effective measures were needed in order to mitigate the impact of climate change on the refugee-hosting system.

134. The representative of **Mozambique** thanked the Office for supporting internally displaced persons in his country's northern province of Cabo Delgado. Assistance from UNHCR and other United Nations agencies and partners on matters such as shelter and social services was significantly improving the lives of Mozambicans in areas with refugee populations. He welcomed the Office's efforts to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda and stressed that international protection solutions should involve all origin, transit, host and donor countries. He commended the Office's efforts to deliver solutions for refugees and displaced individuals despite the security incidents experienced by humanitarian personnel in dangerous work areas.

135. Even though asylum systems were being placed under strain by rising numbers of applicants, he urged countries to continue to host people in need of protection in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. His Government welcomed the \$760 million disbursed in cash in 2023 to meet the basic needs of 7.3 million displaced persons. However, in light of the \$511 million allocated to impact area 4, further efforts to address the socioeconomic problems faced by refugees and to implement sustainable, cost-effective solutions would be a crucial next step.

136. The representative of the **Russian Federation** said that he welcomed the Office's innovative approaches and efforts to implement a more effective international protection system based on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. As the primary United Nations structure in that area, the Office's commitment to a broader range of assistance activities should not detract from its core function of assisting refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons in a non-politicized manner in accordance with the principles of neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality.

137. He encouraged UNHCR to provide additional assistance with the reintegration of returning refugees and internally displaced persons and to continue its support for the implementation of his Government's voluntary repatriation initiative for Syrian refugees. However, he was concerned about the increasingly strict asylum rules in Europe and the removal of asylum processes to countries outside the European Union. While welcoming the Office's successful #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, which would conclude in 2024, he drew attention to the mass statelessness in a number of European countries and urged the Office to continue its efforts to reduce the number of stateless persons as a priority.

138. The Russian Federation had established a legal framework for providing reliable protection to foreign nationals and stateless persons. Since 1992, 800,000 stateless persons had been granted citizenship and over 14,000 individuals from 74 countries had received asylum in its territory. His Government was taking steps to achieve the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees and had introduced draft legislation establishing four types of asylum: refugee status, temporary asylum, political asylum and temporary protection. A new federal law had simplified the process of obtaining Russian citizenship for stateless persons and specific efforts were focussed on preventing statelessness among children.

139. In 2022, over 5 million internally displaced persons had arrived en masse from the cities of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson and the Luhansk People's Republic. They had received proper protection and enjoyed an adequate standard of living. The Office's staff, which conducted unhindered visits to their accommodation facilities on a regular basis, could verify the effectiveness of the Russian authorities' efforts to receive and accommodate arrivals.

140. The representative of **Switzerland** congratulated the Office's partners on their tireless efforts to ensure that the rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons were respected, often under very difficult circumstances. With the number of forcibly displaced persons rising steadily, the international community's role in promoting and ensuring peace would be vital in reducing the number of people in need of protection. He therefore stressed the need for an integrated approach: humanitarian interventions must be introduced at the outset of a crisis as a first step towards durable solutions.

141. For pragmatic and practical reasons, while acting within its mandate under the relevant Conventions, UNHCR must be as flexible as possible in supporting asylum-seekers and host communities, managing mixed routes and complementary pathways, and considering issues such as the right to asylum in third states and triangular cooperation. A proactive approach was needed in order to combat exploitation, human rights violations, trafficking in persons and all types of profit by criminal organizations. He encouraged the Office and its partners to continue their efforts to

prevent those risks to asylum-seekers until all of the affected individuals enjoyed safe and dignified pathways for accessing protection.

142. As the majority of displacement cases involved internally displaced persons, he emphasized the Office's critical role of providing protection and promoting durable solutions in collaboration with other stakeholders in the United Nations system and urged it to provide further support for community and regional approaches and to take environmental considerations into account. All of its activities should address the specific needs of the most vulnerable people, including children, who were often exploited and whose right to an education was too often ignored; women, who required far more effective protection from and treatment of sexual assault, particularly in conflict situations; and people with disabilities, whose needs were often unmet.

143. The representative of **Uganda** said that the right to enjoy asylum freely and transparently within an impartial system was the cornerstone of international protection. While her Government was proud of its transparent and fair asylum process and, owing to its open-door policy, had received vast numbers of asylum-seekers, threats to the inalienable right to asylum in other States were concerning. She called on all States to ensure that their pledges of support for displaced populations, such as those made by Uganda at the Global Refugee Forum 2023, were delivered. Her Government was monitoring that process and expected other States to fulfil their responsibility to protect displaced populations on a daily basis as many host countries were doing.

144. The representative of the **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** expressed concern about the 117 million persons who had been forced to leave their homes due to violence, conflict, discrimination and other forms of persecution. Drawing attention to the Israeli military operations in Gaza and the resulting humanitarian crisis for the many displaced Palestinians, she called on countries to implement the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in order to address the deplorable situation in the Middle East and put in place a proper framework for assisting displaced persons. Her country, which endorsed the non-refoulement principle, had not returned anyone to countries of origin where their life might be at risk.

145. Restrictions on movement, inadequate conditions and lack of due process for asylum-seekers violated international humanitarian law and basic human dignities and perpetuated xenophobia. It was essential to take a robust and consistent approach that would guarantee the rights of all persons, protect them from discrimination and address the root causes of displacement. Those outcomes could only be achieved through investment and coordinated action.

146. The representative of **Poland** said that, like many countries, Poland was hosting and providing protection to people from a neighbouring country, Ukraine, whose lives had been devastated by the Russian Federation's illegal war of aggression. His Government had adapted its policies as that situation evolved. On 1 July 2024, its legislators had adopted a law that extended the legal stay of almost 1 million Ukrainian refugees until October 2025 and provided tailored solutions consistent with the provisions of Council of the European Union Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof.

147. As from 2025, refugees would be able to change their status from temporary protection to temporary residence, granted for three years, simply by updating their personal information in the database of the province where they lived. Access to medical, family and social assistance and collective housing would be expanded and support would continue for individuals at risk of social exclusion such as people with disabilities, older persons, pregnant women and women with children under one year old, and single caretakers of three or more children. The refugees from Ukraine had quickly entered the Polish labour market as employees and entrepreneurs and their contribution to the economy was already noticeable. His Government planned to simplify the procedures for registering employment and acquiring social insurance and to extend the period during which displaced persons with doctor, dentist, nurse or midwife qualifications could carry out their profession in Poland by a further 32 months.

148. Education, training and employment were key to the delivery of protection. To that end, the granting of child benefits was contingent on the child's enrolment in compulsory preschool, primary or secondary education within the Polish system. His Government had established a post of intercultural assistant for students with little or no knowledge of Polish, who were also entitled to free tuition in the Polish language for up to 36 months.

149. His Government was also committed to providing assistance outside its borders. In 2024, it had contributed €1 million to the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Sudan emergency and \$250,000 in response to the appeal of the UNHCR Office in Yerevan as part of the cash assistance programme for 500 of the most vulnerable refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh.

150. The representative of the **Islamic Republic of Iran** said that he was concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza as a result of the Israeli military operations there and reiterated his Government's call for an immediate ceasefire and urgent access to humanitarian aid. Owing to the prolonged instability in neighbouring Afghanistan, there had been a significant influx of Afghan refugees along what had become one of the top 10 country-to-country migration corridors in the world according to the World Migration Report 2024. His Government was providing them with basic necessities and delivering free and inclusive education and essential health care services.

151. In light of the burden that the influx of refugees was placing on his country's services and resources and the effect of mixed flows on the socioeconomic capacity of host communities, he decried the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran, which hindered the country's ability to provide protection to those who needed it. He called on the High Commissioner to include in his next note on international protection a mention of the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures on refugee protection delivered by targeted host States and on the Office's provision of assistance to host communities.

152. He objected to the use of language relating to sexual orientation that was politically sensitive and not universally accepted. In view of its global mandate, UNHCR should not promote controversial concepts of that kind, which could pose a barrier to the local integration of refugees.

153. The representative of **Zambia** thanked the Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, Mr. Raouf Mazou, for visiting Zambia on the occasion of World Refugee Day 2024 and reiterated her Government's intention to strengthen its partnership with UNHCR. Zambia continued to offer various forms of protection, including civil registration, basic services and justice, and her Government was committed to the provision of livelihoods and self-reliance; the coexistence of persons of concern and host communities; the reception, admission and registration of forcibly displaced persons; and the eradication of statelessness. Civil registration and documentation were essential to international protection for refugees as they facilitated access to basic social services, enjoyment of rights and effective planning. For that reason, her Government provided asylum-seekers with legal and administrative documents such as registration certificates, refugee certificates and identity cards, birth certificates and alien cards.

154. Peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities was essential to effective protection and local socioeconomic development. Her Government and its partners had implemented a local integration programme, developed local area plans, involved traditional leaders in refugee management, given refugees a voice in local Government and allowed them to participate in sporting activities. Although challenges such as limited resources and access to justice persisted, Zambia was continuing to make progress in improving the conditions for refugees and asylum-seekers by, for example, including refugee data in national statistical systems with a view to better planning and delivery of support.

The meeting adjourned at 6.14 p.m.
