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Summary record of the 756th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 9 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

General debate (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Ng'oma** (Malawi) said that the Government of Malawi had maintained its open door policy and continued to host refugees. Challenges affecting refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced and stateless persons were exacerbated by limited resources, which hampered daily refugee management operations in Malawi.
2. Funding shortfalls had affected food distribution, with just 0.3 per cent of the refugee population in Malawi reported to be food secure without assistance. Those who benefited from food assistance received the equivalent of just \$5 a month, which was insufficient for a food basket for an individual. The reduction in funding had also affected staff welfare. His Government appealed to partners to provide the resources required for the management and support of refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly in the light of plans to establish a new camp in northern Malawi to ease the congestion in the Dzaleka refugee camp.
3. Malawi called on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other partners to support the Government's current review of its legislation on refugees, which would address emerging challenges of refugee management.
4. Resettlement was one of the durable solutions being implemented in Malawi. However, it had become a pull factor that had attracted asylum-seekers into the country, while the necessary administrative processes had not been sufficiently transparent. He therefore called on all partners to involve Malawi in all efforts to tackle fraud in the country's resettlement programme.
5. The Government fostered an environment that encouraged the voluntary return of asylum-seekers and refugees to countries where the circumstances had greatly improved. The support of UNHCR in that regard was greatly appreciated and Malawi continued to call for support from countries of origin. So far in 2023, 38 families, or 147 individuals, had been voluntarily repatriated and a further 500 individuals were scheduled for repatriation in November 2023.
6. A national plan of action on statelessness, developed following stakeholder consultations and a 2022 study on statelessness and its risks, would be brought before the Cabinet for adoption. Malawi remained committed to hosting, protecting and supporting genuine refugees and working with UNHCR and other partners to find lasting solutions to challenges in that connection.
7. **Mr. Szijjártó** (Hungary) said that he was proud to represent a Christian country which, by its nature, considered human dignity as the highest possible priority. As a country neighbouring Ukraine, Hungary had received more than 1 million Ukrainian refugees and had provided them with equal access to health care, education and employment as part of the largest humanitarian operation in the country's history. At the same time, Hungary was faced with increasing pressure from illegal migration on its southern border, which formed an external border of the European Union.
8. A distinction between refugees and migrants thus needed to be made, in accordance with international law. Under international law, persons who were forced to flee their countries could stay in the territory of the first safe country they reached; international law did not entitle people to choose a country of destination and cross a series of safe countries to get there.
9. The movements of migrants at the southern border of Hungary were a scandal, because those who were arriving had already crossed through a series of safe countries, in violation of international law. Furthermore, they wished to violate Hungarian borders, which was a crime. Hungary had stopped 275,000 illegal migrants at its border in 2022 and a further 150,000 in 2023 so far. Moreover, migrants and smugglers were now bearing weapons and shooting at Hungarian border guards, which could not be tolerated.
10. Such migration movements were fuelled by policies that encouraged people to leave their homes and smugglers to pursue their business model, and forced sovereign countries to give up the right to choose who entered their territory. The allocation of quotas to States

members of the European Union had made it a magnet for immigration, which had led to the creation of parallel societies, increased threats of terrorism and rising antisemitism. The root causes of migration should be addressed, so as to foster environments in which people could continue living in their home countries and communities. Hungary, as a first safe country, had to help refugees because they were people in need while seeing to it that migrants were stopped.

11. **Mr. Mwiimbu** (Zambia) said that Zambia was currently hosting 90,250 asylum-seekers, refugees and former refugees from Angola and Rwanda. As persons of concern, they were hosted in one of three designated refugee settlements, although many lived in urban areas. The settlements were located in rural areas with limited or inadequate infrastructure or access to essential social amenities. As a result, such settlements were unattractive and many refugees in Africa, including in Zambia, opted to live outside them, leading to the movement of people from rural areas to cities and limiting their full enjoyment of a decent quality of life.

12. In 2022, Zambia had embarked on the modernization of refugee settlements, which represented a paradigm shift in the country's approach to refugee protection and would ensure that host communities could gain tangible benefits from development efforts.

13. The Government had approved the first national refugee policy, which would ensure the effective management and coordination of all matters concerning refugees, the comprehensive protection of refugees, their access to essential services and opportunities for integration and self-sufficiency. Refugees had been integrated into the Government's agricultural input subsidy programme, to enhance their self-sufficiency through their active participation in the agriculture sector.

14. Refugees could now benefit from national health insurance and had equal access to education. As part of the Government's commitment to the pledges made during the first Global Refugee Forum, there were plans to connect the three refugee settlements to the main electricity grid. The Government was considering a comprehensive solution for the local integration of former refugees, and persons of concern had been included in development programmes and the 2023 national population census. As part of his Government's commitment to the protection of vulnerable populations, a dedicated taskforce had been established to tackle statelessness. His Government was grateful for the support of the international community and UNHCR and expressed the hope that such support would continue.

15. **Mr. Hassan** (Djibouti) said that Djibouti had fulfilled the commitments it had made at the high-level plenary meeting on addressing large movements of refugees and migrants held in New York on 19 September 2016, despite multifaceted challenges. With the help of development partners, the Government had developed resilient housing for the refugee population, with greater access to drinking water, electricity and roads. Following the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, more than 100 refugees had enrolled at the University of Djibouti and had been awarded up to 40 per cent of government grants to study abroad. Some 800 refugee families, or 4,000 individuals, had benefited from social assistance under the National Family Solidarity Programme.

16. Despite such achievements, which were in keeping with the commitments made by Djibouti at international and regional forums, support from the United Nations system continued to decrease. Moreover, an estimated 240,000 persons entered Djibouti each year, 20 per cent of whom remained in the country, swelling the ranks of its floating population, despite the economic, health-care and security problems entailed. Sometimes, members of the floating population sought asylum, but often insufficient assistance pushed part of the refugee population to migrate elsewhere or to resort to begging in the streets. As a result, the Government's most recent physical check of refugee villages had revealed the absence of dozens of refugee families.

17. Furthermore, climate change and natural disasters made the refugee population yet more vulnerable, and the Government was forced to support refugee communities and host communities alike, which added further pressure. Djibouti reiterated its unwavering commitment to working with the Office to pursue its policy of generosity and inclusion and called on donors to support durable solutions, such as voluntary repatriation and resettlement,

which would encourage host countries to continue to honour their commitments with regard to refugees.

18. **Mr. Motsoaledi** (South Africa) said that South Africa called for immediate restraint, peace and cessation of violence between Israel and Palestine. The High Commissioner had rightly placed a spotlight on protracted conflicts across the globe, including in the Sudan, the Sahel and Ukraine, which had brought about the displacement of more than 110 million persons. The international community must focus its undivided attention on conflicts, irrespective of region, and for the equal distribution of resources aimed at ending prolonged conflicts and preventing new situations from arising. Member States seemed to be capable of spending more on supporting war but were not doing enough for the billions of people in need.

19. South Africa was grateful for the support of UNHCR in addressing backlogs of appeals against negative decisions on protection claims. Such backlogs blocked the path for those who truly deserved protection and compromised the credibility of the provisions of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. To contribute to the global campaign to end statelessness within a decade, South Africa had opened offices of the Department of Home Affairs in all hospitals and clinics where births took place to ensure that all newborns were registered. As a result, civil registration had increased significantly.

20. In the light of the Global Compact on Refugees and the outcomes of the inaugural Global Refugee Forum with regard to predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing among all Member States, solutions for international protection should involve all sending, transit, host and donor countries. South Africa called on sending States and regional and multilateral organizations to increase efforts to address the root causes of prolonged conflicts that led to the displacement of people internally and across borders. If the international community did nothing or less than it was doing currently, the future of coming generations would be lost. Member States should remember that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil was for good people to do nothing.

21. **Ms. Mboukou Kimbatsa** (Congo) said that the Congo was home to over 61,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, almost half from the Central African Republic and all of whom received protection and assistance in line with international legal agreements, thanks to collaboration between the Government and UNHCR. Her Government had also regularized the situation of over 14,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who had all been granted prima facie recognition of refugee status.

22. A legal framework for providing biometric travel permits to refugees living in the Congo had been established, strengthening the protection of such refugees and encouraging their cultural and economic enrichment. On 19 July 2023, with the support of UNHCR, a project for physical checks and registration of refugees and asylum-seekers had been launched to provide reliable statistics regarding such persons and to allow for national policy on their protection to be adapted to their specific needs. The Congo had deposited its instruments of ratification for the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness with the Secretary-General on 7 August 2023 and had established a national committee for the eradication of statelessness. The Congo would continue to welcome persons fleeing all forms of persecution in their countries of origin, despite facing financial challenges in the coordination of its humanitarian responses.

23. In 2016, some 348,000 persons had been internally displaced in the Congo due to social unrest and flooding. A law on the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons had been enacted, but a number of challenges remained in ensuring that the basic needs of persons in situations of vulnerability were met. Refugees and asylum-seekers in the country had not received any substantial assistance since December 2022, in part because health and social support from UNHCR in the Congo had ceased. Her Government therefore called on the Office and its technical and financial partners to increase their support for efforts by the Congo to care for refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.

24. **Mr. Shamukuni** (Observer for Botswana) said that his Government appreciated the technical support and collaboration of UNHCR and its field office in Dukwe, which offered training to ensure that asylum claims were assessed fairly and in line with refugee criteria. Botswana also appreciated the support of other United Nations entities, including the

United Nations country team, which facilitated refugee inclusion. To that end, a workplan was being prepared in line with the new common pledge currently under development since the previous Global Refugee Forum, the so-called United Nations common pledge 2.0.

25. In the financial year 2023/24, the Government would implement projects for the rehabilitation of water supplies, construction of access roads and maintenance of houses in the Dukwe refugee camp, at a cost of more than \$740,000. The primary school there continued to register impressive results and, through partnership with UNHCR, private institutions and individuals offered tertiary education scholarships for refugee children. In accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, all refugees and the births and deaths of refugees in Botswana were registered.

26. Nevertheless, against a backdrop of budgetary constraints, which had been exacerbated by global inflation, recovery measures for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and climate change, the provision of adequate food and non-food items for the Dukwe refugee camp remained a challenge, and for almost a year, UNHCR had been unable to regularly distribute food packages to refugees, which affected their nutritional and health status. Although rations had not been fully augmented, the Government had introduced measures to ensure that provisions were available to the most vulnerable.

27. **Mr. Johnson** (Togo) said that Togo unequivocally supported the protection and assistance of refugees and was home to refugees and asylum-seekers of 27 different nationalities. In 2023, the northern part of the country had seen an influx of internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers, principally from Burkina Faso, due to the security crisis in the Sahel. Despite the complexity of the situation and difficulties in identifying perpetrators of or accomplices to acts of terrorism, Togo applied the principle of non-refoulement by accepting all refugees without discrimination. Togo used a simplified registration procedure to efficiently process asylum-seekers.

28. For the protection and assistance of refugees, internally displaced persons and asylum-seekers, the Government and its partners had taken the following measures: providing food and non-food items; building the capacity of stakeholders working on asylum and the international protection and management of refugees; promoting social cohesion; combating sexual abuse and exploitation; improving counselling and legal advice centres to better address cases of gender-based violence; building roads, health-care centres and schools; and providing school kits for refugee children. The Government had granted Togolese nationality to 1,000 refugee children who had been born in Togo.

29. To address multiple terrorist attacks in northern Togo, the Government had implemented a plan focused on establishing a security-based state of emergency in the region and on reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The plan was supported by an ambitious emergency programme for the resilience of the Savanes region. Open collaboration between the Government and the Office was helping to provide the effective control of displaced persons and the increased government presence that the situation demanded.

30. **Mr. Sazakov** (Turkmenistan) said that Turkmenistan based its foreign policy on peace and the principle of positive neutrality and supported the United Nations as the only universal and legitimate organization for maintaining peace and security. Turkmenistan had defended the principle of holistic and inalienable security for many years and remained convinced that political and diplomatic settlements, socioeconomic assistance for refugees and the eradication of statelessness were key to global human security.

31. Turkmenistan aimed to eradicate statelessness by 2024 as part of the I Belong campaign and would be raising the matter at the Global Refugee Forum to be held in December 2023. The country had granted citizenship to almost 31,000 stateless persons and resident permits to a further 5,000, including 1,301 persons who had been granted citizenship and 265 who had been granted residence permits recently to celebrate Independence Day of Turkmenistan. As part of efforts to fulfil commitments made at the high-level segment on statelessness, his Government planned to accelerate the naturalization process and, through collaboration with the Office, aimed to eradicate statelessness by the end of 2024. Turkmenistan also planned to hold a regional conference on statelessness in 2024 and invited UNHCR and all interested parties to participate.

32. Turkmenistan worked to implement durable solutions for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, with due consideration for gender equality, took steps to implement the Ashgabat Declaration of the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in the Muslim World, participated in the Office's regional campaigns to prepare for the Global Refugee Forum and conducted comprehensive assessments of national strategies in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

33. Turkmenistan called on the international community to increase support measures for stateless persons and refugees and, alongside peacebuilding efforts, to address climate and environmental challenges to human security through wide-reaching dialogues within neutral platforms. His country stood ready to develop multilateral cooperation in strengthening peace, security and sustainable development for the sake of common well-being and prosperity.

34. **Monsignor Pacho** (Holy See) said that the number of forcibly displaced persons, which had exceeded 108 million at the end of 2022, formed an appalling image of unspeakable suffering and the absence of peace. Recognition of human dignity was the cornerstone of any authentic response to the plight of refugees, who were not merely objects of assistance, but rather the subjects of rights and duties and were often victims of humanitarian emergencies they had had no part in creating. The principle of safe and voluntary repatriation should therefore be scrupulously observed, and no person should be returned to a country where he or she could face grave human rights violations or life-threatening situations.

35. The future could not lie in refugee camps, and such temporary and emergency solutions should give way to durable solutions and interim alternative pathways, including accelerated resettlement to a third country, the judicious concession of humanitarian visas, the establishment of individual and community sponsorship programmes, the opening of humanitarian corridors and family reunification.

36. The Holy See welcomed the generosity of many donor countries and host countries and communities that had welcomed millions of forcibly displaced persons. However, the Holy See was deeply concerned that the protection needs of people and support given to host countries were increasingly being used for political ends. It was also concerned about the increasing use of resources and exertion of pressure by richer countries to impose their ideologies on developing countries. Making the provision of financial assistance conditional on the acceptance of such ideologies served only to aggravate debate within international organizations, weaken their core mission and risk further victimizing refugees.

37. The right to seek asylum was based on the recognition of the dignity of every person. It was the duty of humanity and of civilization to rescue persons who were at risk of drowning when abandoned at sea. Protecting and saving lives should be the priority, regardless of whether people had a legal right to international protection. There was an urgent need for concerted action, including in addressing mixed movements of people. As Pope Francis had pointed out in his address at the *Rencontres méditerranéennes* (Mediterranean meetings) in Marseille, France, on 23 September 2023, "the real social evil was not the increase of problems, but the decrease of care".

38. Civilization was at a crossroads. Refugees must be treated not only with human dignity but also with the common good in mind. Without a sense of fraternity, it would not be possible to build a fairer society and bring about lasting peace. His delegation expressed the hope that the Global Refugee Forum would apply those values – the extension of welcome and protection, and humanitas – the values of a true family of nations.

39. **Mr. Murasira** (Rwanda) said that Rwanda was home to over 133,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, including over 13,000 who had been received since November 2022. His Government was therefore concerned at the reduction of humanitarian funding, which affected the provision of basic needs, and called for increased funding to avoid negative effects on the protection and well-being of refugees and asylum-seekers.

40. African countries, including Rwanda, had been generous in receiving refugees, yet faced financial challenges, despite commitments of burden- and responsibility-sharing made

under the Global Compact for Refugees. Humanitarian approaches should be systematically changed, particularly in the light of the current global crisis, and more development offices should be opened, so as to build the economic capacity of refugees.

41. In line with the commitments made by Rwanda at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum, all refugee students were now integrated into the national education system, all urban refugees and boarding school students had access to community health insurance and more employment opportunities had been created for refugees. Nevertheless, increased economic opportunities to meet the needs of refugees and promote their self-reliance were required.

42. Liquefied petroleum gas was now used in two out of five refugee camps and transit centres, but funding gaps had limited plans to make further improvements to refugee centres.

43. All newborn refugees were registered with the national population registry at hospitals, and over 90 per cent of refugees aged over 16 had refugee identity cards which facilitated their access to loans and employment opportunities.

44. Rwanda would remain open to asylum-seekers and returnees but called upon countries hosting Rwandan refugees to ensure their return or their integration into their host communities. Rwanda also called on Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to increase efforts to repatriate their nationals, as agreed in recent tripartite meetings.

45. Emergency transit mechanisms and discussions on tackling issues of illegal migration had shown possible solutions to forced displacement and migration that were aligned with national and international instruments.

46. His Government expressed its gratitude to UNHCR for the achievements made thus far in 2023 and reaffirmed its continued commitment to collaborate for the protection and well-being of refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees and its readiness to share practical experience and lessons learned in that regard.

47. **Mr. Nassin** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that he wished to present the major achievements in the Central African Republic since the previous session of the Executive Committee. In October 2022, his Government had established a national coordination body for the protection of refugees, which included UNHCR actors and partners. On 19 August 2023, the Government had issued an order granting refugee status to those arriving at the border of the Central African Republic from the Sudan; that had followed in the wake of protections afforded to refugees from South Sudan and from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

48. A government operation carried out in May and June 2023 at the borders with the Sudan and Chad had saved lives and led to the establishment of reception centres that had helped some 53,000 displaced persons. In September 2023, those persons had been issued with a refugee identity card. The authorities responsible for refugees status determination procedures had processed 700 new asylum applications, adding to the more than 1,000 asylum-seekers living in the country and making the Central African Republic a good example in terms of international protection. Strategies were in place to establish durable solutions, which had already facilitated the return of thousands of refugees of the Central African Republic and the integration of refugees into the country. The seven signatory countries of the Yaoundé Declaration on solutions in the context of forced displacement related to the Central African Republic crisis would meet in October 2023 to establish a platform for the implementation of the Declaration.

49. The restoration of State authority, implementation of the Luanda road map, introduction of a recovery and development plan and promulgation of a new constitution by referendum strengthened the country's institutions to meet the people's needs.

50. Such a vast project could not be completed without adequate resources. His Government thus called for the mobilization of funds for such a humanitarian cause. Additional resources would be needed to provide effective protection, multisectoral assistance and tangible solutions and to guarantee the reintegration of returnees and the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees.

51. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the continued focus of and progress made by Turkmenistan on the eradication of statelessness

was appreciated, particularly as the global campaign to end statelessness came to an end and the next phase of combating statelessness began.

52. International law did not, as the representative of Hungary had claimed, state that refugees should remain in the first safe country in which they arrived; his Office was always happy to provide training on refugee law to government officials. Indeed, given that 1 million persons had arrived in Hungary from Ukraine, which was greatly appreciated, but only 53,000 had remained, the majority had obviously moved on to countries which had not been their first country of arrival. Such responsibility-sharing of European countries in response to the crisis in Ukraine was exemplary. The statement of Hungary had given the impression that all refugees and migrants went to Europe, but, as the statistics he had referred to in his opening statement had shown, that was not the case. The equation of the arrival of refugees and migrants with the rise of terrorism and antisemitism was dangerous and contributed to the stigmatization of refugees and migrants.

53. He was grateful for the reflections of the Holy See with regard to refugees, particularly the idea that refugees were subjects of rights and duties. The affirmation that the future of refugees was not in refugee camps was also important, and the self-reliance of refugees entailed their inclusion in services until such time as they could return to their country of origin. He was grateful for the advocacy of Pope Francis in support of the dignity of refugees and the sanctity of lives, including those of refugees and migrants who were lost at sea and in other dangerous journeys.

54. UNHCR was keenly aware that food assistance for refugees had declined in a number of African countries and was actively working with the World Food Programme to reverse that trend, which was made more complex due to overall declines in humanitarian assistance.

55. He welcomed the identification of a new site in Malawi to relieve the congestion in the Dzaleka refugee camp. The new site should not be treated as a traditional refugee camp, but rather as a settlement with possibilities for inclusion, employment and self-reliance.

56. The new refugee policies of Zambia were welcome, since it was important that legislation accompanied improvements in the treatment of refugees. UNHCR had been working to mobilize international resources, including from development agencies, to support the work of Zambia on the integration and inclusion of refugees.

57. UNHCR appreciated and would continue to cooperate with the efforts of Botswana to use its own resources to help refugees in the country.

58. The observation by the representative of South Africa that evil triumphed because good people did nothing should be a call to all Member States. Following the visit of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection to South Africa, UNHCR would continue to work to help clear the country's backlog of asylum appeals. Efforts to strengthen civil registration as a way to combat statelessness were positive.

59. Rwanda had always been a strong host country with forward-looking policies and had been one of the first countries to embrace the comprehensive refugee response framework. While work under the tripartite agreement between the Office, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was full of challenges, some of them linked to unresolved political issues and to the difficult situation in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, there was a need to persist, ideally with the support of the international community.

60. The Central African Republic had recently received more refugees from neighbouring countries, including Chad and South Sudan. Earlier that year, he had spoken to President Faustin-Archange Touadéra about the logistical challenges faced in assisting remote populations. His Office stood ready to support all initiatives undertaken to create the conditions for those refugees to return and welcomed efforts to establish a platform to implement the Yaoundé Declaration.

61. He wished to pay tribute to Djibouti for its excellent reception policies, while recognizing the enormous challenge that refugee and migration movements represented for such a small country with limited resources. In view of the complex relationship between migration and protection, there was a need for closer cooperation between his Office and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Djibouti and other countries.

62. The Congo was to be congratulated for strengthening its legal framework for refugees and depositing its instruments of ratification of the United Nations conventions on statelessness. It was an important gesture that he hoped would set an example for other countries in the region.

63. His Office was keenly aware of the risk of further influxes of refugees and internally displaced persons from Burkina Faso into Togo and was highly concerned about the prevailing instability in the central Sahel region, which threatened to cause further refugee movements into coastal countries and associated security risks. There was a need for cooperation to ensure both the protection of refugees and the preservation of national security in host countries.

64. **Mr. Sonko** (Observer for the Gambia) said that the Government of the Gambia was committed to amending the provisions of the country's 1997 Constitution concerning refugees and aliens, including to ensure that the refugee identity card was accepted as valid proof of residence during the naturalization process.

65. The Government requested the continued support of its partners to end statelessness, in relation to which it had completed a comprehensive study. Between August 2022 and February 2023, it had carried out a mass electronic birth registration and national health insurance enrolment campaign, thanks to which public health centres across the country were fully equipped to register births seamlessly.

66. The Gambia was currently hosting 3,751 refugees and 427 asylum-seekers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) subregion, the majority of whom were living harmoniously in rural communities and playing a pivotal role in development activities. The influx of an estimated 1,117 displaced persons from the Casamance area of Senegal in January 2022 underscored the dynamic nature of displacement patterns and reinforced the Government's plea for enhanced support from the international community.

67. In line with its rich tradition of humanitarianism and hospitality, the Gambia was committed to promoting and protecting the rights of refugees and other persons of concern. Under the auspices of the Gambia Commission for Refugees, health and education strategies and programmes had been put in place to protect refugees and guarantee their rights. In May 2023, a study had been conducted to understand and replicate the commendable integration by Guinea-Bissau of former Senegalese refugees.

68. The Government's position was that referring to migrants as "illegal" was unhelpful and stigmatizing. Lastly, it was crucial to emphasize the heightened vulnerability of specific groups such as women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities during episodes of forced displacement. The Gambia called on UNHCR and its partners to provide increased support to countries with limited resources that continued to host such groups.

69. **Mr. Mayom** (Observer for South Sudan) said that he welcomed the leadership and commitment displayed by the High Commissioner, whose visit to South Sudan from 26 to 29 August 2023 had provided a forum for international actors striving to find solutions that responded to the legitimate needs of people seeking protection. South Sudan had opened its borders to vulnerable individuals forced to flee the Sudan and other countries in the region. However, it remained the most underfunded country and could not shoulder that responsibility alone.

70. Over the previous four years, more than 2.2 million people had been displaced by floods in South Sudan, which was also grappling with considerable food insecurity and, since 15 April 2023, an influx of some 300,000 individuals from the Sudan, the majority of whom were South Sudanese returnees. The Government's policy was to ensure that returnees were integrated directly into their places of origin or lived in areas of their choosing. Following the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan in 2018, in excess of 670,000 South Sudanese citizens had spontaneously returned. The situation was overwhelming.

71. The Government's adoption of the National Durable Solutions Strategy and Action Plan, developed with the support of the Office and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, demonstrated its commitment to delivering solutions and highlighted the need

for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. It called on the international community to support the impending operationalization of the Strategy.

72. South Sudan continued to exercise an open-door policy for refugees, in line with its Refugee Act. The policy encouraged the settlement of refugees in host communities, the allocation of agricultural land to enhance livelihoods and build resilience and the granting of freedom of movement and opportunities for employment.

73. In addition to hosting 320,000 refugees, South Sudan was in the process of integrating over 30,000 new arrivals from the Sudan. The Government would require support from the international community to harness their professional expertise and ensure the continuation of the education of younger arrivals.

74. South Sudan looked forward to participating in the Global Refugee Forum, which would provide a unique opportunity for States to commit collectively to practical, long-term solutions for refugees, other persons of concern and their host communities.

75. **Mr. Gevorkian** (Armenia) said that Armenia was currently dealing with a massive influx of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, whose entire population had been forced to leave their ancestral homeland by the large-scale military offensive launched by Azerbaijan on 19 September 2023. According to preliminary reports, the attack had claimed more than 200 lives and left a further 500 wounded, while 170 had died in a tragic explosion outside Stepanakert in the immediate aftermath. The attack, which had been preceded by a 10-month siege, had been the culmination of the long-standing policy of Azerbaijan aimed at completely exterminating the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan had sought, through its actions, to create conditions unbearable for life and provoke forced displacement. Only once it had achieved the complete ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh had it allowed the deployment of a United Nations fact-finding mission, and even then, the scope of the mission had been limited.

76. Armenia had received more than 100,000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, including 30,000 children and many other members of vulnerable groups. Those arrivals had been in addition to the 36,000 refugees forcibly deported from Nagorno-Karabakh following the 2020 war. To date, Azerbaijan had refused to ensure their right to return to their homes, in utter disregard of its obligations under the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020. Many of the refugees had become victims of multiple displacement, having had to flee atrocities perpetrated by Azerbaijan in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

77. People arrived in Armenia injured, traumatized and hungry. Thus, the support of the international community was crucial to saving lives and meeting the early recovery and long-term protection needs of forcibly displaced individuals. Armenia welcomed the joint appeal issued by the Office in that regard and hoped that the Armenia Refugee Response Plan would mobilize capacities and ensure a comprehensive and coherent response. Armenia remained steadfastly committed to providing a decent life for refugees and promoting durable solutions, including by upholding refugees' inalienable right to safe, voluntary and dignified return.

78. **Ms. Eyiah** (Ghana) said that she wished to express her condolences to the families of the victims of the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza.

79. Ghana was currently dealing with an emergency influx of people from Burkina Faso through multiple entry points along the border, which was posing challenges to its reception mechanisms and national security. The Government and its partners were striving to improve the absorption capacity of host communities in the Upper East and Upper West Regions. In addition, the Government was cooperating with UNHCR to implement livelihood activities in order to reduce dependence on donor funding. Nevertheless, significant resources were required to enhance the country's capacity to cope with the emergency, which was still unfolding, at a time when UNHCR was downsizing its operations in Ghana and reducing funding for the country's refugee programme. The existence of other refugee emergencies worldwide did not diminish the seriousness of the situation in Ghana, which therefore made an urgent plea to the Office and to donors to sustain their levels of badly needed assistance.

80. Ghana remained committed to ensuring that refugees and asylum-seekers within its borders were not left behind in development initiatives and lived in safety and dignity. Earlier

that week, in keeping with the Government's belief in the importance of finding durable solutions to protracted refugee situations, the Ghana Immigration Service had begun to register former Ivorian refugees and issue them with indefinite residence permits that would facilitate their inclusion in social and economic life. Moreover, the Government was continuing to issue refugees with the Ghana Card, without which they would not be able to engage in many socioeconomic activities.

81. **Mr. Sagini** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that he wished to thank the High Commissioner for his visit to the United Republic of Tanzania earlier in the year.

82. The United Republic of Tanzania was currently hosting 256,309 refugees amid a significant financial crisis that was undermining the provision of humanitarian assistance. Health posts at refugee camps were being closed, food rations had been halved and education was being insufficiently funded. The situation risked causing tension between refugees and host communities as they scrambled for resources, refugee children were likely to be stunted by undernourishment and, to make matters worse, UNHCR Tanzania had ordered implementing partners to reduce their budgets by 30 per cent.

83. The United Republic of Tanzania had started to receive asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the beginning of 2023 and had been forced to use resources originally budgeted for other purposes, leading to a significant gap in the provision of services to refugees. Nevertheless, UNHCR Tanzania had stated that additional funds could not be granted because the situation did not constitute an emergency. With the rainy season approaching, special attention was required to prevent epidemic diseases.

84. The funding crisis was also adversely affecting the implementation of durable solutions, for example the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees. UNHCR and the Governments of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania had agreed to send two convoys of refugees each week, but UNHCR did not have the capacity to do so. It was important to ensure that Burundian refugees could return home in order to avoid a protracted refugee situation.

85. In that connection, the Government continued to call for the cessation of refugee status for the Burundian nationals hosted by the country. While acknowledging that UNHCR had an obligation to protect vulnerable people, the Government had its own obligation to prevent abuse of the right to seek asylum and did not believe it was fair for protection and humanitarian assistance to be afforded to individuals whose reasons for fleeing no longer existed.

86. Despite the challenges faced, in 2023, the Government, in close collaboration with UNHCR Tanzania, had helped 12,998 refugees to return to their countries of origin and had resettled a further 5,804 in third countries. The United Republic of Tanzania remained committed to all international instruments governing refugee issues and to welcoming refugees and finding durable solutions.

87. **Mr. Vasquez** (Philippines) said that the Philippines associated itself with the joint statements to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the Group of Friends of the I Belong Campaign to End Statelessness. It continued to be one of the most vocal and active partners of UNHCR and was a committed donor to the Office's refugee response plans. It wished to stress the importance of UNHCR maintaining its operational focus and the urgent need to inject fresh energy into global humanitarian action, with middle countries as drivers of change.

88. The Philippines was proud of its humanitarian tradition and understood the plight of displaced persons. It was determined to champion the rights of vulnerable groups, not least through the Philippine Development Plan 2023–2028. It had achieved several milestones in 2022, including acceding to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, promulgating the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act, adopting the Rule on Facilitated Naturalization of Refugees and Stateless Persons, developing its asylum capacity and implementing the Complementary Pathways Programme for Rohingya refugee students. Efforts to end statelessness should not falter as the transition from the I Belong campaign to end statelessness by 2024 to the Global Alliance to End Statelessness approached.

89. The work of UNHCR should be aligned with urgent global objectives such as achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and addressing climate change, which was a driver of population movement and displacement. In the Philippines, attention was paid to disaster risk reduction and resilience, and the rights and welfare of displaced people and communities, as exemplified by the recent approval by the House of Representatives of a bill on the rights of internally displaced persons.

90. The Philippines reiterated its strong support for UNHCR, which had to be given the resources to fulfil its mandate. Long-term solutions required political will and cooperation from the entire community of nations, with a common vision of peace, security and inclusion.

91. **Ms. Schroderus-Fox** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, said that persons with disabilities were the world's largest minority, accounting for roughly 16 per cent of the global population and of a much higher proportion of groups affected by conflicts and emergencies. Furthermore, persons with disabilities were disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises and faced significant barriers to receiving humanitarian assistance.

92. The Group of Friends could trace its roots back to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the launch of the Charter. Since then, it had played an active role in promoting disability inclusion in the humanitarian architecture and the United Nations system more broadly. Its advocacy efforts had contributed to the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, while another milestone had been the adoption by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee of its Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

93. While humanitarian actors had become better equipped to identify the needs of persons with disabilities, much more needed to be done to meet those needs. Given the growing insufficiency of funding, ensuring that humanitarian responses were inclusive of the most vulnerable persons was key to their effectiveness. Such responses were often designed to provide standardized solutions that did not adequately address the potential barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

94. The Group of Friends looked forward to the Global Refugee Forum as an opportunity to further strengthen the inclusion of displaced and stateless persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. It encouraged UNHCR to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in the Forum by ensuring the accessibility of the venue and all relevant information. It also stood ready to support all stakeholders in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities through new and emerging pledging frameworks and wished to emphasize that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations were best placed to support the development, implementation and monitoring of inclusive pledges.

95. More broadly, the Group of Friends would continue to push for the humanitarian system to move beyond ad hoc efforts towards more systematic models of inclusion that were embedded in humanitarian policies and practices.

96. **Mr. Yun Seong Deok** (Republic of Korea), speaking on behalf of Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia (MIKTA), said that the MIKTA group had been established 10 years previously to foster cross-regional dialogue, identify avenues for cooperation and promote an inclusive and resilient world. The group was deeply concerned by the recent proliferation of multidimensional crises that endangered global stability, growth and prosperity, had caused the number of forcibly displaced persons to soar to an unprecedented 108 million and generated a heavy burden for host countries, 76 per cent of which were low- and middle-income countries.

97. It was important to provide durable solutions for refugees, in particular through resettlement and complementary pathways, which were a tangible demonstration of burden- and responsibility-sharing in the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees. The group recognized refugees' contribution to the societies in which they resettled and wished to highlight the need to respect and protect the human rights of forcibly displaced persons in transit.

98. The group was concerned that sexual and gender-based violence continued to be a feature of conflicts and displacement crises globally and urged UNHCR and the international

community to intensify their efforts to support the most vulnerable groups, ensure that no one was left behind in humanitarian responses and protect refugees and other forcibly displaced persons from national and transnational organized crime.

99. Despite the significant needs of refugees and other persons of concern, many of the Office's operations were underfunded. While applauding the generosity of donors in providing ever-increasing financial contributions, the group wished to underline the need to broaden the donor base, ensure the efficient and effective use of resources and make funding more flexible to better respond to needs. It commended the Office's efforts to enhance cooperation with entities within and outside the United Nations system and, with the second Global Refugee Forum approaching, called on States and other actors to step up collective efforts to develop and match pledges. The group would continue to support UNHCR and its mandate and to work as part of the international community to address the root causes of displacement and find durable solutions.

100. **Mr. Constant Rosales** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, said that the Group of Friends attached particular importance to the Office's mandate because the political, economic, social and environmental dynamics of recent decades had triggered major emergencies requiring international protection for thousands of people. In view of that mandate and of the gravity of the situation on the ground, it called for the urgent adoption of measures to provide international protection to the heroic Palestinian people, who had endured years of brutal aggression, until those responsible had been brought to international justice. It considered that the best way to ensure sustained progress towards a more peaceful and secure world was full adherence to the spirit in which the United Nations had been established, as clearly enshrined in its Charter, including the promotion of friendly relations among nations on the basis of respect for the principle of equal rights, self-determination and the settlement of disputes through dialogue and cooperation.

101. The Group of Friends regarded unilateralism, extremism, exceptionalist conceptions and foreign interventionism as being among the main root causes of global crises that generated massive human displacement. It wished to emphasize that the application of unilateral coercive measures against entire peoples, in contravention of all rules of international law, represented the most sophisticated cause of displacement by depriving more than one third of humanity of the full enjoyment of their human rights. Moreover, human actions, based on a model of unequal economic accumulation and the exploitation of resources, had exacerbated the climate catastrophe, threatening the fragile coexistence between humans and nature, generating extreme natural events and resulting in mobility crises that had to be addressed through solidarity and cooperation.

102. In the field of humanitarian assistance, it was important to stress the importance of full adherence to the core principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and operational independence, as set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182. The provision of such assistance was one of the most critical tasks of the United Nations and required financial resources, technical expertise and high-risk operational capacity. The Group of Friends called on the international community to lend support in that regard, including through voluntary, unearmarked contributions, and wished to underscore the need to address issues inherent to the Office's mandate from a perspective of human rights, dialogue and cooperation, while avoiding, at all times, the politicization of refuge.

103. **Mr. Virabutr** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of the I Belong Campaign to End Statelessness, said that the campaign had been launched in 2014 to eliminate statelessness for millions of people who were not only deprived of their right to a nationality but also often faced reduced access to legal employment, property rights and public services, in addition to travel restrictions, social exclusion and heightened vulnerability to abuse.

104. The campaign was grounded in the belief that statelessness could be resolved if there was a strong political will to do so. Over the previous decade, considerable progress had been made thanks to States' efforts in granting or confirming citizenship, issuing identity documents, allowing access to basic services, raising awareness of the issue to enhance public

perception of stateless people, improving national statistics on statelessness, building civil registration capacity and ratifying relevant conventions.

105. The Group of Friends appreciated the Office's continued advocacy on the issue, support for Member States in the implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024 and collaboration with affected persons and communities, civil society and partners. The campaign would end in 2024, yet its goal had not yet been achieved. The Group of Friends therefore encouraged all relevant stakeholders to intensify their efforts and mobilize resources to resolve existing situations of statelessness and prevent the emergence of new cases. It welcomed the adoption of the international recommendations on statelessness statistics developed by the Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons and Statelessness Statistics and called on States to consider following them. Furthermore, it encouraged the accelerated implementation of pledges from the first Global Refugee Forum and the 2019 high-level segment on statelessness.

106. The campaign's conclusion should not spell the end of efforts to eradicate statelessness. The second Global Refugee Forum would be an ideal time to show solidarity with stateless persons by making additional pledges for more ambitious actions that would make a difference on the ground. The Global Alliance to End Statelessness would provide an opportunity for multi-stakeholder cooperation to build on the campaign, including through the solutions seekers programme to be launched in December 2023. The Group of Friends therefore invited Member States and other stakeholders to consider joining the Global Alliance in order to achieve a world where no one was left behind.

107. **Mr. Molina** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela continued to welcome refugees and demonstrate its traditional solidarity by providing protection to those who needed it without discrimination, in accordance with domestic legislation.

108. His Government fully complied with the principle of non-refoulement of refugees, did not punish those who entered its territory irregularly in search of international protection and applied due process in handling all asylum requests. It did not accept the irresponsible use of the term "refugee" by UNHCR and other United Nations bodies, in complicity with host and transit countries, to describe Venezuelan nationals who had migrated for economic reasons or had been forced to move abroad by the 930 unilateral coercive measures imposed illegally by the United States of America, the European Union and other allies. The term was being manipulated to paint the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as a source of millions of refugees as part of an attack on the country fuelled by the exclusionary Quito Process and the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, both of which were coordinated by UNHCR and IOM. Those agencies published figures with little scientific rigour and had, since 2018, collected millions of dollars from the very countries that were inducing migration through the criminal use of unilateral coercive measures. The behaviour of UNHCR and certain States posed a major challenge to initiatives such as the Global Compact on Refugees and even to possible responses to refugee situations led by the Office. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela called on those States and UNHCR to avoid misinterpretations and reiterated that international cooperation was fundamental to protecting refugees and finding durable solutions.

109. The Government had been taking steps to expand training for officials at border posts and modernize the National Refugee Commission, which systematically carried out monitoring visits with the support of UNHCR. Further measures would be introduced to bolster the Commission over the following three years.

110. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela valued multilateral diplomacy as a tool for strengthening international forums, ensuring transparent working methods and defending the Charter of the United Nations and international law more broadly.

111. **Mr. Grandi** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Philippines was right to call for support from middle countries, which were perhaps not big donors or recipients of refugees but could draw on their experiences to make a contribution. The Philippines had led by example through the implementation of its complementary pathways programme and a recent donation to the emergency response fund for the Sudan.

Regarding climate action, his Office stood ready to learn from the Philippines as an expert country on the matter.

112. UNHCR, together with its partners, was endeavouring to support Armenia and had launched a funding appeal two days previously. It stood ready to discuss solutions for all persons displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict recently and in the more distant past.

113. The representative of the Gambia had provided good examples of his country's efforts to promote inclusion and was correct to criticize the labelling of migrants as "illegal".

114. There was an urgent need to accelerate the reintegration plan for South Sudanese returnees. He hoped that more support could be mobilized to implement the commitments discussed during his recent visit to South Sudan, which, despite the challenges it faced, continued to receive refugees from the Sudan.

115. He supported the Ghanaian appeal for more resources. In a few weeks' time, Ghana would host the second African Forum on Displacement, which would be attended by the Deputy High Commissioner, who would have the opportunity to hold bilateral talks with the Government on the challenges presented by the influx of people from Burkina Faso.

116. While he understood the frustration expressed by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, his Office was doing its best to mobilize resources for repatriation efforts. It would look into the issue of asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the understanding that new arrivals should be dealt with as a matter of priority.

117. It was important not to forget that, for many years, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had been a host country for refugees, which was why his Office enjoyed close cooperation with the Government. UNHCR and IOM had, on many occasions, proposed the establishment of a working group to discuss the issues of definitions and figures. Following constructive talks in New York, work was ongoing to set up such a group in Geneva. The work of UNHCR, IOM and other humanitarian agencies dealing with Venezuelan refugees and migrants had only one objective: to support a population that needed humanitarian assistance, protection and, hopefully, in the future, durable solutions.

118. Lastly, he was grateful for the views shared, support expressed and advice given in the four joint statements, which had been well noted.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.