



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
28 November 2023

Original: English  
English, French and Spanish only

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

### Summary record of the 761st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 12 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Ahmed Hassan ..... (Djibouti)

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

**Consideration of reports of the Standing Committee** (*continued*)

**(a) International protection** (*continued*) ([A/AC.96/74/2](#), [A/AC.96/74/3](#) and [A/AC.96/74/10](#))

1. **Mr. Daka** (Ethiopia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that, while the number of refugees was on the rise – with low-income countries shouldering a disproportionate share of the responsibility – funding was continuing to decline. Ahead of the upcoming Global Refugee Forum, it was vital that Member States and stakeholders took practical action to realize the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, including by committing to burden- and responsibility-sharing. The Group urged those Member States that had yet to engage meaningfully in hosting refugees to show solidarity. It called upon Member States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and the private sector to make pledges, including multi-stakeholder pledges, and encouraged the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure the participation of a broad range of actors.

2. The tragic loss of lives of persons making dangerous journeys was alarming. States must commit to strengthening – not hindering – access to safe and legal pathways in accordance with the principle of responsibility-sharing. In the light of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Group urged Member States to abide by the principles it contained. Addressing the root causes of displacement was needed to bring an end to the cycle of conflict and violence. Closing borders was not the solution; instead, peacebuilding, enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation and tackling issues such as rising food prices were needed to prevent displacement.

3. The Group encouraged African solutions to African problems, as well as investment in development projects and in the loss and damage fund established at the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Despite the multifaceted challenges it faced, Africa was doing its share and had made great progress in hosting and protecting refugees.

4. **Mr. Suarez** (Philippines), noting that UNHCR had the difficult task of prioritizing limited financial and human resources amid pressing needs, said that a key component of the Office's work should be the inclusion of displaced persons, in particular groups in vulnerable situations, such as women and children, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples. To that end, initiatives and programmes were required to ensure equitable access and participation, integrate displaced persons into national systems, address all forms of violence, including exploitation and gender-based violence, and ensure freedom from discrimination, racism and systemic inequalities. UNHCR could play a decisive role in that regard by helping to steer global narratives and political messaging on refugees and displaced persons.

5. In the long-term, efforts should be made to ensure that displaced persons were equipped with the skills to become productive members of their respective communities. Education was therefore critical and could be supported by States through the ambitious Global Refugee Forum pledge to enrol 15 per cent of refugees in higher education by 2030. Given the complexities associated with mixed flows of refugees and migrants, it would be interesting to know how UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) could work together to ensure the complementary implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Countries of origin, transit and destination must prevent persons in mixed flows from facing inhuman conditions and pushbacks, which sometimes resulted in the loss of lives at land and sea borders.

6. Lastly, the Philippines called for efforts to address statelessness to continue, in the run-up to the end of the I Belong campaign and the launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, in 2024.

7. **Ms. Fowler** (New Zealand) said that, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, each and every State bore responsibility for the promotion and safeguarding of human rights for all. Societies were stronger, safer and more prosperous when the rights

of marginalized groups were respected. As multiple displacement crises were unfolding across the globe, New Zealand was dedicated to collaborating with UNHCR and the global community to find enduring protection solutions for refugees. It wished to express its appreciation for the tireless efforts of UNHCR to provide such solutions and offer humanitarian aid to displaced populations, often operating in perilous and isolated environments.

8. The world was facing multiple threats and challenges, including the impact of climate change. The scale of humanitarian crises and human rights violations would continue to increase without collective action to fight climate change. Concerted efforts were also under way to wind back the rights of individuals belonging to vulnerable groups, including women and girls in all their diversity, the LGBTQIA+ community, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities. Dedicated resourcing was needed to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. New Zealand was an advocate for inclusive humanitarian action grounded in a comprehensive protection agenda. It applauded the Office's prioritization of its policy on gender-based violence.

9. Being united was more important now than ever before. New Zealand was steadfast in its endeavours to promote international cooperation and effective burden-sharing to address global displacement. It remained committed to implementing its pledges and supporting adaptable and sustainable protection solutions.

10. **Mr. Moyo** (Zimbabwe) said that the continued rise in the number of displaced persons in need of humanitarian assistance was attributable to manifold challenges, including conflicts and climate change-induced disasters. As the financial support decreased, Africa, which was hosting the largest numbers of refugees and displaced persons, was hardest hit by the challenges of providing them with international protection. There was an urgent need to intensify efforts to address the root causes of forced displacement and make greater investments in peacebuilding and dialogue to resolve conflict. Zimbabwe called upon States to honour their commitments to climate financing and looked forward to the operationalization of the loss and damage fund.

11. Regarding the challenges of mixed movements of migrants and asylum-seekers and trafficking in persons, Zimbabwe encouraged continued collaboration between UNHCR and IOM as a means of bridging the funding gap and leveraging technical expertise to address issues affecting persons of concern to UNHCR holistically. In Zimbabwe, asylum applications were processed and refugee status was determined by an inter-agency committee, with the assistance of the UNHCR country office; there was currently no backlog in applications.

12. Zimbabwe supported efforts to address the root causes of displacement and find durable solutions, with voluntary repatriation emerging as a viable way of returning persons of concern to their countries of origin in a dignified manner. His Government would welcome the Office's assistance, however, in addressing situations in which persons of concern were unwilling to return home after the cessation of refugee status, without compromising their dignity, safety and rights.

13. **Ms. Rooijmans** (Kingdom of the Netherlands) said that the Netherlands fully agreed with UNHCR that stronger asylum systems and robust mechanisms were central to States' ability to provide protection to those seeking safety from conflict and persecution. Asylum systems helped to ensure that such persons had non-discriminatory access to safe territory, received international protection and could exercise their basic rights. The Netherlands was heeding the call of the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection: it was examining the possibility of making pledges at the upcoming Global Refugee Forum to the Asylum Capacity Support Group. In recognition of the need for effective responsibility-sharing and support to host countries and communities, it would also bolster its support for the Prospects Partnership with UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank.

14. Protection was key to durable solutions. The Netherlands supported the approach of UNHCR with regard to the unique vulnerabilities faced by certain populations, including women, children and LGBTQI + refugees.

15. **Mr. Padi** (Ghana) said that Ghana recognized the necessity of burden-sharing and protecting refugees and asylum-seekers. His Government aimed to implement truly durable solutions by continuing in its endeavours to facilitate local integration in the case of protracted refugee situations. Host communities had been adequately educated and informed about the need for welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers and sharing scarce local resources with them.

16. There was, however, an urgent need to improve the absorption capacity of host communities. For that reason, Ghana continued to urge all stakeholders to play their part in assisting host nations, in particular those facing ongoing emergencies. It joined the Group of African States in calling upon all countries to meaningfully engage in hosting and supporting asylum-seekers and refugees. At the same time, actions to improve peacebuilding and conflict prevention must be taken. The Global Refugee Forum provided a platform for all to commit and contribute to ensuring the protection and dignity of refugees and asylum-seekers.

17. **Mr. Rose** (Australia) said that he wished to express his Government's deep concerns about the safety of humanitarian workers after staff members of the United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross had been killed in Gaza and Israel. Adherence to international law and the protection of civilians in all conflicts was imperative.

18. Australia valued the work of UNHCR, carried out in increasingly challenging circumstances, including in the Asia-Pacific region, where humanitarian needs were escalating. It commended Pakistan and Iran for their decades-long commitment to hosting Afghan refugees and called upon them to remain exemplars of refugee protection. The voluntary and sustainable repatriation of refugees, in safety and dignity, remained difficult owing to reports of human rights abuses, including the systematic oppression of women and girls, since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Australia continued to stand by the Afghan people, including by providing humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and supporting Afghan refugees and their host countries and increasing its resettlement of Afghan refugees.

19. Similarly, Australia applauded the generosity of Bangladesh and other countries of the region, where over 1 million displaced Rohingya were being hosted. It was using every lever at its disposal to press for a resolution to that crisis and continued to call upon the military regime in Myanmar to create conditions conducive to the Rohingyas' safe and dignified return. In the meantime, his Government was committed to providing support for displaced Rohingya and their host communities in Bangladesh. It provided flexible contributions to humanitarian partners to enable them to sustain life-saving assistance while responding to emerging priorities. It was ready to work with Bangladesh to explore ways to build the self-reliance of Rohingya refugees, including through skills training and education programmes, in accordance with the joint response plan for the Rohingya humanitarian crisis.

20. Ahead of the second Global Refugee Forum, Australia was considering how to build on its ongoing support to those refugee situations. It remained committed to assisting States to establish and grow refugee resettlement programmes and sustainable complementary pathways, such as through labour mobility. Lastly, Australia commended UNHCR for its age, gender and diversity approach and encouraged all participants in the 2023 Global Refugee Forum to ensure that pledges were inclusive.

21. **Mr. Stillhart** (Switzerland) said that his Switzerland encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts to protect refugees and other persons of concern in all their diversity, including LGBTQI+ persons, by providing them with inclusive services, protecting their human rights and identifying solutions. Despite significant efforts and resources, the growing needs of an increasing number of persons seeking international protection were not being met. Political discourse on refugees, especially those in mixed movements, was becoming more hostile. Attempts to find durable solutions did not take sufficient account of the protracted length of crises or the interests of refugees and host communities. Greater coordination between UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was therefore welcome. While respect for the international body of law protecting refugees and migrants was essential, there was a strong need to identify systemic solutions; the Global Refugee Forum could serve as an ideal platform in that respect.

22. Despite the efforts of UNHCR, the resources needed to tackle refugee situations remained limited, jeopardizing the provision of international protection to persons of concern. The basic conditions should be enhanced to allow for improved access to employment, which could help in reducing protection needs. Additional efforts were also needed, such as in the case of Tanzania, which was still receiving insufficient support from the international community while awaiting conditions conducive to safe and dignified return.

23. Switzerland welcomed the efforts of UNHCR in the areas of child protection and education in emergency situations. As a co-signatory of the Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, the Office was a member of the Hub's steering group and its technical working group. In just two years, the Hub had made great progress. Interested parties were encouraged to join the multi-stakeholder pledge on education in emergencies at the Global Refugee Forum.

24. The scale of gender-based violence was a cause of increasing concern and required integrated action at various levels. UNHCR and its local partners must ensure the mobilization of adequate financial and human resources to prevent abuse and support victims. The involvement of local organizations, in particular women's organizations, was essential, as was adequate protection tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable persons. Switzerland welcomed the efforts of UNHCR and the wider United Nations system to strengthen the protection framework for vulnerable persons, such as women and children, persons with disabilities and victims of gender-based violence, trafficking or enforced disappearance.

25. Following the independent review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Global Protection Cluster, headed by UNHCR, was playing an important role in coordination and reform of the humanitarian system. Switzerland stood ready to contribute to joint reflection in that realm, in particular concerning the need to strengthen the centrality of protection in humanitarian responses and the need for sustainable resources and leadership. Lastly, prolonged crises hindered the right of return, thereby underscoring the importance of supporting return movements as soon as the opportunity arose.

26. **Ms. Munro** (Canada) said that, as a donor providing UNHCR with flexible and predictable funding, Canada encouraged the Office to continue its partnership with refugee-led groups and host communities in order to advance local solutions and humanitarian-peace-development nexus opportunities to ease the pressure on host communities, support social cohesion and strengthen resilience. UNHCR should also continue its efforts to address the intersectional needs of vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, LGBTQI+ persons and persons with disabilities, including through programmes to combat gender-based violence. It should streamline its protection architecture to ensure coherent humanitarian responses, in accordance with the recommendations arising from the review of the implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee protection policy.

27. Persons persecuted owing to their sexual orientation or gender identity were persons of concern to UNHCR. In addition to its previous efforts to resettle LGBTQI+ refugees, Canada had begun to collaborate with a new referral partner for resettlement to Canada and doubled the number of annual resettlement spaces for human rights defenders. It was on track to resettle over 45,000 refugees in 2023 and had also welcomed almost 40,000 vulnerable Afghans, since September 2021. Canada was also working to support regional efforts, including under the comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework (MIRPS), through capacity-building to strengthen responses to mixed flows and increased resettlement from the Americas.

28. As Chair of the Global Task Force on Refugee Labour Mobility, Canada was encouraged by the number of complementary pathways being launched globally. Non-governmental partners played an important role in that endeavour. Labour shortages in many economies were an opportunity to match refugees with jobs and new communities. Canada was building on the lessons learned from rapidly offering temporary residence to Ukrainians in order to explore new humanitarian pathways for other populations in need of safe haven.

29. **Ms. Namono** (Uganda) said that the need for protection commenced at the point of displacement and continued through transit countries to the country in which refugee status

was granted. As the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection had said, all persons had the right to seek asylum and have access to transparent, fair and impartial asylum systems. The system of asylum in Uganda was not only transparent but it also provided for cases to be appealed before the higher courts. It was to be hoped that other countries provided for the same. Similarly, just as Uganda respected the right of all persons to seek asylum without discrimination, it expected that other countries would treat Africans and persons of African descent seeking asylum in a fair and inclusive manner.

30. There was an urgent need for climate action. In Uganda, where refugees and host communities lived predominantly in rural communities and depended on forests for food, energy, shelter and income-generation, the protracted refugee situation had negatively affected the natural environment. Her Government hoped that its partners would match pledges it intended to make on that subject at the forthcoming Global Refugee Forum.

31. Uganda was proud of its integrated refugee response policy, by which refugee settlements were indistinguishable from local communities, as had been noted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in his note on international protection (A/AC.96/74/3, para. 32). However, the country continued to grapple with challenges to meet the humanitarian and development needs of refugees and host communities in the light of the continuous budget cuts. Through equitable and timely burden- and responsibility-sharing, refugees could become development agents, empowering them to become valuable members of the local community and, ultimately, of the country hosting them in their time of most need.

32. **Mr. Dávalos** (Ecuador) said that, as the number of crises continued to grow, forcing an unprecedented number of persons to flee their homes, the fundamental rights and principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were as relevant as they were 75 years ago, including in relation to the protection of persons of concern to UNHCR and the need for robust asylum systems to guarantee non-discriminatory, safe and secure access to territories by such persons. In Ecuador, a country with a long history of receiving persons on the move, in particular those seeking international protection, the legal framework was aligned with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The effective application of the principles of non-refoulement and burden- and responsibility-sharing was of paramount importance.

33. As a result of its humanitarian tradition, Ecuador had fostered the integration, inclusion, well-being and rights of refugees, while also promoting conditions conducive to the development of host communities. Ecuador had received the largest number of asylum applications in the region, with a total of 270,000 persons in need of international protection, the vast majority of them Colombian or Venezuelan citizens. As at July 2023, 75,000 persons had been granted recognized refugee status and, during a regularization process carried out in 2022 and 2023, 200,000 persons, most of them of Venezuelan nationality, had been registered, enabling them to obtain a temporary residence visa.

34. Ecuador would continue to support the search for protection solutions for persons of concern to UNHCR and to work with all relevant stakeholders towards the implementation of the Global Compact and the principles of burden- and responsibility-sharing.

35. **Ms. Keyo** (Ethiopia) said that enhancing the self-reliance of refugees was the best response to the protracted situation of refugees, enabling refugees to exercise their socioeconomic rights and lead a dignified life. To that end, her Government had taken a number of measures, including increasing opportunities for refugees in joint projects with partners and the private sector, integrating refugees into health and education services and helping them to take up work offered by local governments.

36. Her Government's efforts required the collective support of the international community. However, burden- and responsibility-sharing had to date been inadequate, unequitable and inconsistent when it came to hosting, protecting and assisting refugees. The refugee response of Ethiopia continuously faced a critical funding gap. All refugees, irrespective of their origin or destination, were equally vulnerable and needed the attention of donors. Timely and unearmarked funding was vital to refugee protection.

37. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum would be an opportunity for States to give multi-stakeholder pledges and make contributions that could change the lives of refugees and host communities and realize the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, including the principles of equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing. Ethiopia was committed to making new and enhanced pledges, including on the climate, social inclusion, job creation, agriculture and gender-based violence. It would welcome matching pledges from partners in those areas.

38. Lastly, Ethiopia was extending a hand to refugees while dealing with its own internally displaced persons. Her Government wished to express its appreciation for the support of UNHCR and partners. However, more support was needed to address the challenges faced by internally displaced persons. Now was the time to show solidarity to host countries and to all persons of concern to UNHCR.

39. **Ms. Kalmbach** (United States of America) said that, with an unprecedented number of people on the move, the brutal and bloody invasion by Russia of Ukraine and Afghans continuing to flee their homeland, the need for humanitarian intervention was consistently outpacing the resources available. As there was no sign of that changing, it was time to be creative. The United States was taking a whole-of-government approach to foster innovation, find solutions and build partnerships to make real changes on the ground.

40. The protection of all refugees was key to durable solutions. It was crucial to acknowledge the unique vulnerabilities faced by certain refugee populations, including LGBTQI+ refugees. The United States had made unprecedented efforts to rebuild its refugee resettlement programme and was processing a greater number of cases. It had launched the Resettlement Diplomacy Network to share innovative and best practices for resettled refugees in receiving communities and, in coordination with UNHCR and IOM, was establishing safe mobility offices to address the challenge of migration and protect asylum-seekers on treacherous journeys. Temporary protected status had been granted to hundreds of thousands of persons and humanitarian parole pathways had been made available to Afghan, Cuban, Haitian, Venezuelan and other nationals seeking safety in the United States.

41. The United States was also working to advance protection in large-scale protracted refugee situations, partnering with Governments to advance economic inclusion and social protection and working with the private sector to find win-win investment opportunities in refugee-hosting areas. In partnership with the World Economic Forum, it had launched a call to action to challenge companies to invest \$10 billion in global frontier markets by 2030.

42. The United States was promoting multilateral development bank reform to help to ensure that development resources were directed to the most vulnerable people living in fragile environments, including places facing climate crises, such as the Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Over time, those efforts would yield significant protection results for refugees and for host countries alike.

43. **Ms. Rosenvinge** (Norway) said that Norway echoed the concerns expressed by the delegation of Australia over the safety of humanitarian workers in Gaza. The increasing number of persons forcibly displaced by war and conflicts was staggering. Norway thanked host countries for their generosity in receiving such persons. To help in alleviating the burden, Norway provided unearmarked funding for UNHCR and resettled refugees. It encouraged other countries to follow suit.

44. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach was more important than ever. Partnerships and collaboration between UNHCR, IOM, the World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP) were commendable. Norway supported the whole-of-route approach and agreed that new ways of working in an increasingly complex context of displacement and migration were needed.

45. The human rights of all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, must be respected. To that end, the Norwegian Government had launched an action plan for the period 2023–2026 on gender and sexual diversity, designed to secure the rights of gender and sexual minorities and ensure freedom from hate crime. Under the action plan, humanitarian efforts funded by Norway must be inclusive of sexual and gender minorities.

Norway advocated for the equal treatment and non-discrimination of LGBTIQ+ persons falling under the UNHCR mandate, as well as their access to tailored protection and support.

46. Norway commended the efforts of UNHCR to tackle sexual violence and gender-based violence, including by implementing the “Engaging men in accountable practices” initiative to prevent violence against women. It was vital to include men in that type of work, while bearing in mind that boys and men could also be victims of sexual violence and gender-based violence.

47. **Mr. Koh** Young Kul (Republic of Korea) said that the integrated approach of UNHCR to refugee and displacement issues had at least two meanings: the first involved integrating and maximizing the use of humanitarian and development resources; the second entailed taking an integrated, coordinated approach through collaboration with not only IOM but the entire United Nations system and other stakeholders. UNHCR was not the only United Nations entity responding to refugee and displacement issues. That was why, at the Executive Committee’s 759th meeting (A/AC.96/SR.759), his delegation had emphasized the need for the Office to play a more central and active role as the leading entity specializing in refugee issues, including by acting as the coordination mechanism for all relevant activities.

48. Interestingly, over the past two years, more than \$11 billion in development assistance had been spent on displacement issues – an amount equal to the Office’s entire funding for the same period. In the case of Korea, some \$68 million had been committed, mostly to UNHCR, to date in 2023, while its total contribution to various agencies working on displacement issues exceeded \$230 million. It was also implementing displacement projects in countries of origin and host countries, thereby contributing to burden- and responsibility-sharing and efforts to find durable solutions.

49. Durable solutions could only be found once peace and stability had been restored and self-sufficiency promoted in countries of origin. For example, the Burundian Government had fostered conditions conducive to the voluntary and dignified return of refugees, a programme on which his Government and UNHCR were also cooperating. Similar meaningful and viable repatriation and integration programmes would continue to be supported by Korea.

50. Non-refoulement and the right to seek asylum were fundamental principles by which all States must continue to abide. The security and safety of displaced populations and humanitarian workers must be ensured in all circumstances.

51. **Mr. Garratt** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom would support UNHCR in its endeavours to ensure that no one was left behind, including by providing inclusive services for vulnerable persons of all ages, genders and diverse backgrounds, including LGBT+ people. It was not right that simply being oneself could, in some contexts, have perilous consequences. The United Kingdom would continue to stand up for equal treatment, non-discrimination and access to protection for all persons under the Office’s mandate.

52. While the collective capacity to respond to rising humanitarian needs and displacement globally was stretched, host countries had, in many cases, increased their commitments to generosity and inclusion. Although the budget of UNHCR had almost tripled in the past decade, the challenges remained immense, chief among them how to determine who faced a well-founded fear of persecution and how best to deter irregular migration and people smuggling.

53. Ahead of the Global Refugee Forum, it was a shared responsibility to focus resolutely on the protection of the most vulnerable. Displaced people were best placed to know what their needs were. The United Kingdom would work with UNHCR and other humanitarian partners to listen to them, including at the Forum, where refugees would have a central role in the United Kingdom delegation. It would also work with other delegations to identify what support it could provide to enable others to do the same.

54. **Ms. Flores Ynserny** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that her delegation wished to reiterate that ongoing confusion over the definition of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants undermined the implementation of the relevant legal frameworks, with serious



repercussions for the provision of international protection to those groups of persons, not to mention the politicization of refugee and migration issues. The adequate processing of asylum applications and the rigorous collection of data on refugees were crucial to ensure that persons in need of international protection received it in a timely fashion and could exercise their rights without discrimination.

55. The effectiveness of the international protection system hinged on the will to find durable solutions. States had a legal obligation to provide assistance and protection to refugees and facilitate their voluntary repatriation. Voluntary repatriation should be considered as a best practice to find effective, durable solutions to the refugee situation and as part of States' responsibility-sharing initiatives.

56. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wished to express its solidarity with the people of Palestine. It strongly condemned the ongoing genocide by Israel against the people of Palestine, jeopardizing international peace and security and violating the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It was deeply concerned about the re-escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip, which had resulted in the loss of thousands of lives and would inevitably lead to the forced displacement of thousands of persons. Already one of the world's largest refugee populations, Palestinians were in urgent need of international protection. The resumption of hostilities was rooted in the fact that, for more than 75 years, it had been impossible for the Palestinian people to assert their historical rights. Her Government called for an end to the violence and hostilities and the resumption of political dialogue to achieve long-lasting peace, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

57. **Mr. Junejo** (Pakistan) said that three quarters of the world's 110 million forcibly displaced persons were hosted in low- and middle-income countries, with almost 40 per cent of refugees in three countries, Pakistan among them. Pakistan remained resolute in its support of Afghan refugees, in spite of the economic and development downturn caused by the cascading effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, protracted and new conflicts and climate emergencies. For over four decades, it had been shouldering a disproportionate burden of the international responsibility to protect Afghans. In Pakistan, millions of Afghans continued to benefit from unhindered access to health care, education and other services, including through the provision of thousands of tertiary education scholarships.

58. In 2022, catastrophic floods in Pakistan had affected 33 million people, including 800,000 refugees, and a third of the country had been submerged, causing \$30 billion in damage. Pakistan welcomed the appeal launched by the High Commissioner; however, the needs on the ground were overwhelming, while the materialization of allocated funds remained drastically low. A further 700,000 refugees had arrived since the Afghanistan transition, further compounding the challenges that Pakistan faced.

59. The deficit in international solidarity with refugees and host communities, including the absence of adequate financing for host countries, was one of the major issues of the time. Alone, host countries could not realistically be expected to host, assist and protect refugees. With the second Global Refugee Forum approaching, Pakistan called upon the international community to step up and match its decades-long contribution to refugee protection through burden- and responsibility-sharing. Lastly, Pakistan requested UNHCR to adhere to universal language in its documents. Refugees from diverse cultures could not be enticed into developing new identities that were inconsistent with their values and culture.

60. **Mr. Bicalho Cozendey** (Brazil), commending the solidarity shown by low- and middle-income countries hosting refugees, said that Brazil wished to reiterate its position in favour of more effective burden- and responsibility-sharing.

61. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a timely reminder of the right to seek asylum. With that principle in mind, Brazil had adopted measures and policies to facilitate safe access to its territory, including humanitarian visas, and ensure the equal rights of refugees and migrants. A simplified refugee determination procedure was in place for persons from several countries, such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The procedure had been extended to include individuals fleeing countries where LGBT+ minorities were criminalized and women and girls at risk of female genital

mutilation. Brazil therefore welcomed the inclusive age, gender and diversity approach in the programmes and services of UNHCR. Explicitly addressing sexual orientation in United Nations documents served to promote the rights of LGBT+ persons globally.

62. Brazil was committed to presenting high-quality pledges at the second Global Refugee Forum, which was an opportunity to enhance burden- and responsibility-sharing and promote refugee self-reliance and complementary pathways.

63. **Mr. Mayr** (Germany) said that, in challenging times, it was critical for the international community to work together to uphold fundamental rights, including the right to seek asylum, which was a cornerstone of the international legal framework. It was also imperative to safeguard and uphold the rights and dignity of refugees fleeing conflict, persecution and violence. All humans deserved protection, no matter their age, gender or sexual orientation: it was a matter of protection, not of ideological conviction. Germany was proud to support the protection work of UNHCR as its largest contributor of flexible funding.

64. Displacement was never voluntary; many refugees and displaced persons wished only to return home. Returns must be made in conditions of safety and dignity and in an informed and voluntary manner. The country of origin bore primary responsibility for creating conditions conducive to returns. Germany stood ready to provide support through peacebuilding and other assistance.

65. The High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges had served as reminder that durable solutions were a matter of protection. In the light of financial constraints, it was necessary to combine humanitarian development and peace instruments to achieve durable solutions and focus humanitarian funding where it was most needed.

66. He wished to highlight two issues of particular concern. First, collective action was needed to protect the most vulnerable, including refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities, from the effects of climate change. Second, women and girls on the move were particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. As the current global lead of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, Germany had made forced displacement and gender-based violence a strategic focus of its two-year term. The upcoming Global Refugee Forum provided an opportunity to address gender-based violence in displacement settings. Germany was organizing a multi-stakeholder pledge on the subject.

67. **Ms. Izata** (Angola) said that more political will and greater economic investment were necessary to eliminate the causes of forced displacement. In addition, robust human rights protection frameworks should be established in affected countries. Mixed movements of migrants and asylum-seekers had forced States to implement new status determination systems, and a global approach was required for the implementation of efficient migration and asylum management systems.

68. Angola continued to improve its institutional and regulatory framework for the protection of the more than 52,000 refugees and asylum-seekers that it was currently hosting. Its resumption of the general biometric registration procedure for the attribution of new identification documents to refugees and asylum-seekers would speed up the processing of cases and create better social conditions for the inclusion of refugees in public policies.

69. As Angola was also committed to reducing the risk of statelessness, it had established 35 civil registry offices in 18 countries between 2020 and 2022 in order to expand the database for Angolan citizens abroad and break the chain of unregistered adults and children.

70. **Mr. Tour** (Sudan) said that the Sudan had taken vigorous action, in coordination with the UNHCR country office, to establish systems for the organization of asylum. However, further improvements were required, particularly in the registration system. The Sudan would therefore appreciate the greatest possible support from UNHCR given the current budgetary funding situation.

71. The goal of protection called for durable solutions based on immediate and long-term compliance with the principle of responsibility and burden-sharing. The Sudan had experienced significant setbacks in its protection situation owing to the current war. Recovery from that situation would demand time and resources.

72. **Mr. Nzuz**a (South Africa) said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights underscored States' responsibilities as duty-bearers, particularly with respect to dignity, non-discrimination and the right to life, liberty and security of person. The nexus between peace, stability, development, respect for human rights and humanitarian assistance should be recognized when tackling the root causes of displacement. The international community should empower countries of origin to promote dialogue among communities and parties engaged in conflicts and to create conditions for safe and sustainable voluntary return.

73. South Africa had recently established a Border Management Authority, which was tasked with combating human trafficking and guaranteeing international protection for persons in need. Countries should also facilitate, in collaboration with UNHCR, the repatriation of their nationals who were no longer in need of international protection.

74. International refugee law should not be exploited by economic migrants to gain unlawful access to foreign countries, and the right to freedom of movement should not be exploited to encourage States to abdicate their responsibility to promote the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. South Africa was committed to improving the livelihoods of all people living in the country. The Government guaranteed access for asylum-seekers, refugees and other persons of concern to education, health care and livelihood opportunities. It also promoted peaceful co-existence in communities in cooperation with the inter-agency protection working group, which brought together representatives of government departments, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations, refugees and migrants.

75. South Africa would continue to support the work of UNHCR, including through voluntary contributions.

76. **Ms. Marroquin Mogollón** (Observer for Guatemala) said that Guatemala expressed its condolences for the unjustified attacks carried out in Israel. It also expressed regret concerning the victims of natural disasters in Afghanistan.

77. Guatemala reiterated its commitment to the promotion, protection and defence of the human rights of refugees and persons requesting refugee status and international protection, and to all processes aimed at fulfilling the commitments made under the Global Compact on Refugees, including the second Global Refugee Forum.

78. As Guatemala was a country of transit, refuge and return in a complicated context, it appreciated UNHCR support for the strengthening of its institutions so that it could continue to provide assistance for refugees and persons requiring international protection.

79. The comprehensive regional protection and solutions framework was a clear example of States' political determination to develop comprehensive responses and solutions on behalf of vulnerable people and persons on the move. Guatemala also appreciated the action taken by the support platform for the framework, which was currently led by the United States of America.

80. The Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection bolstered the frameworks for international protection and cooperation and reaffirmed the commitments undertaken at the meeting of Special Coordinators that had been held in Guatemala in 2023.

81. Guatemala reiterated its gratitude to UNHCR for its visits to Guatemala, including the visit by the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, during which she had inspected migrant and refugee reception centres.

82. **Mr. Hamedani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that he wished to convey his condolences to Afghan citizens who had lost their loved ones in the recent devastating earthquake, which had led to the displacement of tens of thousands of people. If the international community failed to respond promptly to their urgent need for food, shelter, medicine and life-saving infrastructure, his country might be faced with another large influx of displaced persons.

83. The humanitarian situation in the region had been continuously aggravated by the political turmoil in Afghanistan following the prolonged presence and thoughtless withdrawal of troops from the country. Iran had continued to offer Afghan nationals access to livelihood opportunities, public education, health care and other essential services. In an

endeavour to alleviate the challenges faced by the Afghan population due to the Taliban's strict regulations, which included a ban on female students pursuing higher education, Iranian universities had demonstrated their willingness to accommodate and enrol a significant number of Afghan female students.

84. The international community should demonstrate its solidarity with Afghan refugees and people in need of international protection and their host communities, since the support for the mixed flow of refugees and migrants provided by Iran could not be a permanent solution. While the Islamic Republic of Iran supported the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, it believed that priority should be given to voluntary repatriation. The disregard for the solution of voluntary repatriation by certain stakeholders, based on the pretext of ongoing instability in Afghanistan, was no longer acceptable.

85. The UNHCR budget for 2023 failed to cover hosting expenses, and there had been a significant discrepancy between the proposed annual budget and the actual budget for UNHCR operations in Iran.

86. The inclusion of politically sensitive and controversial language concerning sexual orientation that did not enjoy international consensus, such as that contained in paragraph 16 of the note on international protection (A/AC.96/74/3), could hinder the work of UNHCR.

87. The Islamic Republic of Iran expressed its deep sympathy for the innocent people in Gaza, who were under heavy bombardment by occupiers.

88. **Mr. Savchuk** (Observer for Ukraine) said that he wished to commend the progress made in the implementation of the UNHCR response plan in support of Ukrainians who had been displaced or affected by the war waged by Russia. Ukraine appreciated the work of the Regional Contact Centre, which provided critical information to displaced Ukrainians, and the network of Blue Dot protection and support hubs.

89. Ukraine was grateful to all countries that provided protection to temporarily displaced Ukrainians. According to UNHCR surveys, the overwhelming majority of them hoped to return to Ukraine in the future. It was important to ensure that they were able to travel to Ukraine for short periods pending more durable returns in the future. The recommendations contained in the UNHCR report of August 2023 entitled "The impact of travel to Ukraine on refugee's legal status and access to rights in host countries" urged host countries to maintain a flexible approach to short term-visits to Ukraine.

90. The note on international protection erroneously referred to "the conflict in Ukraine" instead of to the international armed conflict between the Russia and Ukraine. The General Assembly had condemned, in numerous resolutions since 2014, the armed aggression by Russia against Ukraine, the organization of illegal referendums in regions within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine and their attempted illegal annexation. Moreover, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights had found that Russia had effective control over all areas in the hands of illegal armed groups in the Donetsk and Luhansk Provinces of Ukraine as from 11 May 2014. Ukraine was deeply alarmed at the dire situation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, including children, who had been unlawfully deported from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine to Russia under the pretext of evacuation. It reiterated its demand to Russia to provide UNHCR and other humanitarian and human rights mechanisms with full and unhindered access to the people in question in order to facilitate their safe and dignified return to Ukraine in accordance with international law.

91. **Ms. Fauziah** (Observer for Indonesia) said that there had been no significant progress in the situation in Myanmar. More than 1,000 Rohingya refugees had arrived in Indonesia in the last two years. UNHCR and Indonesia had held a dialogue for a comprehensive regional response for Rohingya refugees in July 2023 with a view to mobilizing potential donors and ensuring that the issue was included in global efforts to seek durable solutions for refugees. Indonesia would continue to support action to ensure sustainable peace that encouraged the voluntary and safe return of Rohingya refugees.

92. As the current Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Indonesia had taken steps to resolve humanitarian issues in Myanmar, including through the establishment of an office of an ASEAN special envoy on Myanmar. It would also continue

to encourage the implementation of the five-point consensus adopted by the Association in 2021 to address the situation there.

93. **Mr. Bombassei** (International Organization for Migration) said that IOM would continue its close cooperation with UNHCR, especially with a view to developing coordinated policies, joint tools and a common framework for the development of a route-based approach to key issues at all stages of the journey in countries of origin, transit and destination, through concrete measures and in coordination with all relevant stakeholders.

94. IOM and UNHCR were working to enhance the complementarity and implementation of the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees. A joint pledge would be presented during the Global Refugee Forum in coordination with the United Nations Network on Migration.

95. **Ms. Sivapragasam** (Asia Displacement Solutions Platform), speaking on behalf of non-governmental organizations, said that her delegation wished to express its sincere condolences for Israeli and Palestinian lives lost and for persons affected by the earthquake in Afghanistan.

96. Conflict remained the predominant root cause of forced displacement, but natural disasters, climate change and statelessness were also becoming drivers and compounding factors. Solutions to forced displacement should encompass local integration, voluntary return, resettlement and the right to nationality. It was also essential to tackle root causes and to adopt complementary strategies. Progress towards achieving durable solutions remained modest. Returning home was not an option, resettlement opportunities were extremely limited, and formal legal or social integration into host communities frequently remained a distant prospect.

97. Two years after the Taliban de facto authorities took over in Afghanistan, the economy remained in a dire state, humanitarian needs had intensified and food insecurity had increased. Protection challenges, such as discrimination against women and girls, prevented the creation of an environment conducive to returns. UNHCR and States should continue to support humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan and to uphold the UNHCR non-return advisory for Afghanistan. Members of the support platform for the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees should adopt a principled approach to responsibility-sharing, mobilization of resources and provision of long-term support with a focus on safeguarding fundamental rights. The Global Refugee Forum would provide a crucial opportunity to increase third-country solutions and would enable the support platform core group to synchronize its resources and strategies.

98. Rohingyas and other minority groups in Myanmar had faced persecution and systematic discrimination for decades. Compounding factors of statelessness and political turmoil compelled affected populations to undertake perilous journeys in pursuit of safety. UNHCR and the international community should spearhead the establishment of a support platform for Rohingya responses in order to encourage regional strategies and increase international support, particularly in Bangladesh, and to promote transitional as well as durable solutions.

99. UNHCR and Member States should take immediate action to address the ongoing challenges faced by civilians in Myanmar and Afghanistan. It was essential to ensure accountability, to promote the release of individuals detained for their political beliefs, to facilitate access to humanitarian assistance and to provide support for internally displaced persons.

100. Quality education could empower displaced and stateless persons to rebuild their lives and contribute to their host communities. Transitional solutions needed to prioritize livelihood programmes encompassing the right to work, vocational training, microfinance initiatives, and entrepreneurship opportunities. As displaced and stateless persons frequently grappled with trauma, robust psychosocial support services were imperative. Legal aid, child protection, prevention and response to gender-based violence, community engagement and advocacy efforts were also essential. Investment in awareness-raising and first-response efforts was a pressing requirement. Displaced and stateless persons were at the forefront of

decisions regarding their future, and the international community should respect and support those decisions with a refugee-centred approach.

101. Complementary pathways for displaced persons should complement and not replace asylum and resettlement obligations. In addition, expansion of family reunification visas and development of statelessness determination procedures conducive to residency and citizenship could support those goals. Assistance must remain free from political influences, and constructive diplomatic engagement was required.

102. **Ms. Azizi** (Afghanistan) said that Afghanistan continued to be devastated by conflict, political instability and natural disasters, leading to significant increases in the number of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers. Many of them had fled from atrocities committed by the Taliban, seeking protection in neighbouring countries and beyond. The international community should not turn a blind eye to their plight.

103. The recent waves of mass deportation, punishment and beatings suffered by Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran and on the Turkish borders were cause for deep concern. It was essential to uphold the rights of refugees that were enshrined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, particularly in light of the current circumstances in Afghanistan. They frequently faced life-threatening situations and should not be subjected to further harm or returned to places where they would face persecution and violence at the hands of the Taliban. Young female activists and protesters who had been trapped in Pakistan for over a year were particularly at risk. It was imperative to prevent them from being forced back into the hands of the Taliban, where their safety and well-being would be in danger.

104. Developed nations should step forward to alleviate the plight of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers, and expedite the procedures for processing asylum claims. Financial and logistical support should also be extended to countries hosting large numbers of Afghan refugees so that adequate care and protection could be provided to vulnerable individuals. The escalating crisis in Afghanistan necessitated international protection for refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing from the Taliban atrocities.

105. **Ms. Triggs** (Assistant High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that she appreciated the many expressions of support for the Global Compact on Refugees and for the principles of solidarity and responsibility-sharing. She also welcomed the call for ambitious stakeholder pledges and commended the inclusion of refugee advisers in many delegations.

106. She underscored the importance of the framework of engagement with IOM, which laid the basis for an effective response to mixed movements and the development of a panoramic route-based approach. She also highlighted the complementary nature of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration. The Foreign Minister of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had recently confirmed his Government's agreement to launch a technical discussion with UNHCR and IOM on issues such as definitions and figures.

107. The age, gender and diversity approach applied by UNHCR focused on vulnerable groups, such as older persons and persons with disabilities, and persons who were persecuted based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Women and children were also subject to extreme levels of gender-based violence, particularly in the context of displacement and conflict.

108. Additional funding was required for voluntary repatriation, which provided a durable solution. For example, she had recently engaged in discussions concerning the return of Burundians to Burundi. The United Republic of Tanzania had provided them with protection for many years but lacked the funds to facilitate their return.

109. UNHCR would also like to broaden the base for resettlement solutions and thanked all States that had significantly enhanced their resettlement programmes, including the United States of America, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, Ireland and Brazil.

110. The Office appreciated the positive response by certain States in recent years to statelessness. The Government of the Philippines had played a leading role in that regard and had highlighted the contributions that could be made by so-called middle countries. She welcomed the recognition of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

111. The action taken by the Global Protection Cluster, which was led by UNHCR, was of great importance.

112. The decline in UNHCR funding was a critical issue. However, steps were being taken to enhance the agency's efficiency by prioritizing specific activities.

113. While many people were displaced by the impact of climate change, the majority were displaced by erupting conflicts. UNHCR expressed its deepest sympathy to the families of the many civilians and humanitarian actors who had been killed during the past few days as a result of the conflict in Gaza and Israel.

114. She thanked the United States for its support for the whole-of-route approach through the establishment and funding of safe mobility offices with the support of partners in the Americas.

115. Children accounted for about 42 per cent of the persons whom UNHCR sought to protect. It was important to enrol them in educational institutions, to provide documentation for their families and to ensure that they had access to psychosocial support.

*Statements made in exercise of the right of reply*

116. **Ms. Paumier López** (Observer for Cuba) said that she wished to comment on the statement made by the representative of the United States on the granting of humanitarian parole to Cuban citizens. The extremely adverse impact on the Cuban economy and on people's standard of living of the economic embargo imposed by the United States prompted Cubans to leave the country by regular means and take advantage of the policy of the United States Government that enabled migrants who crossed the border illegally to obtain a residence permit under the Cuban Adjustment Act. The true causes of Cubans' mobility should not be manipulated.

117. **Ms. Kalmbach** (United States of America) said that the United States unequivocally condemned the appalling attack on Israel by Hamas militants from Gaza. Terrorism was never justified. The United States objected to the characterization by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela of the response by Israel as genocide and reiterated its ironclad support for the exercise by Israel of its inherent right to defend itself in the face of an unjustified attack.

**(b) Programme budgets, management, financial control and administrative oversight** (A/AC.96/74/2, A/AC.96/74/4, A/AC.96/74/4/Add.1, A/AC.96/74/7, A/AC.96/74/10 and A/AC.96/74/11)

118. **Ms. Clements** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the scale of forced displacement was continuously increasing in the face of crises that seemed to multiply and spread. The 110 million forcibly displaced people bore witness to the unrelenting pace of humanitarian emergencies, social, economic and political crises, and the climate crisis. Yet UNHCR was thoroughly committed to the implementation of its mandate to protect forcibly displaced and stateless persons, regardless of how daunting the task might seem. History had repeatedly shown that its efforts were not in vain.

119. The budget for 2023 stood close to \$11 billion, including the \$10.2 billion approved by the Executive Committee in 2022, to which supplementary requests had been added to meet unforeseen emergency needs, for example in Pakistan, Ethiopia and most recently in Armenia. The outlook for 2024 provided little cause for optimism, whether in Ukraine, Afghanistan and the Sudan, where the anticipated needs remained high. As a result, a budget of \$10.6 billion was expected. The funds currently available had reached \$4.8 billion, or just 44 per cent of the total needs identified. UNHCR had received roughly \$600 million less in 2023 than at the same time in 2022 and was working around the clock to raise additional funds.

120. The Office prided itself on its ability to prioritize and to find new and ingenious means of delivery. It was committed to working hand in hand with more than 1,100 partners on the front lines of displacement. However, if underfunding persisted until the end of 2023, it would be forced to do less, and the consequences for refugees and their hosts would be dramatic. Fewer families would receive cash assistance in Yemen, host and refugee communities in Uganda would be unable to fully benefit from health services, and Syrian

refugees in Jordan or Lebanon would be forced to return to the Syrian Arab Republic prematurely or to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean.

121. UNHCR was fully aware of the economic, social and political pressures faced by host and donor countries when it came to meeting all needs, including those of their own citizens. It was nonetheless essential to share collective responsibility to forcibly displaced and stateless people, for instance by enabling UNHCR to allocate its resources more flexibly and efficiently to parts of the world where they were most urgently needed. It was unfortunately projected that, by the end of 2023, the share of UNHCR unearmarked and softly earmarked funds would have dropped by as much as 10 per cent compared to 2022.

122. Earmarking made the UNHCR response less effective by predetermining, irrespective of needs, where humanitarian funds should be directed. It generated tension between host States, and treated refugees and forcibly displaced persons differently based on geography or on the publicity accorded to certain crises.

123. Earmarking and underfunding also created inefficiencies in the fundamental infrastructure of humanitarian aid, and resulted in a reversal of economies of scale that not only threatened present and future gains, but also risked undoing long-term achievements in education, health and protection.

124. Concerns related to the absence of language on inclusion and accountability in the UNHCR budget document had been addressed during the September 2023 meeting of the Standing Committee. The omission of the reference to the UNHCR budgetary planning and programmatic approach, which took into account factors such as age, gender, and diversity in all its forms, had been due to internal miscommunication. The language used in the programme budget documents submitted to the Executive Committee for more than a decade had now been restored.

125. UNHCR had embarked on its process of transformation, including decentralization and regionalization, in order to become more agile, efficient, inclusive and collaborative. Decision-making had been delegated to UNHCR regional offices, which were closer to refugees. Decentralization had been supported and strengthened by investments in data and digitalization, including state-of-the-art cloud-based systems. The new human resources solution, Workday, had been launched in 2022, and the enterprise resource planning system for finance and supply had been launched on 18 September 2023. In addition, new elements of the project reporting, oversight and monitoring solution (PROMS) had been rolled out, and upgrades had been made to the strategic planning and budget system (COMPASS) and Workday. The new business transformation programme systems had been tested, and the volume of transactions executed by country operations was increasing, with purchase requests, supplier invoices, payments and travel transactions all on the rise.

126. Insights would be gained and potential course corrections would be identified through a variety of internal and external reviews of UNHCR decentralization. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had undertaken an audit of the business transformation programme. The Evaluation Office of UNHCR had begun an independent evaluation of UNHCR decentralization and regionalization, and the Multilateral Organization Performance Assessment Network would shortly issue its report on UNHCR.

127. Thanks to the experience gained during the first few years of transformation, UNHCR was well positioned to review and streamline its capacities and to eliminate duplication, including in the workforce. However, as further action would be required to absorb the expected funding shortfall for 2024, efforts were being made to reduce expenditure on personnel and administration so that additional resources would be available for refugees and other persons of concern. UNHCR endeavoured to be as transparent and consultative as possible during such procedures, especially in parts of the organization where the impact would probably be most acute. The planned reduction in the workforce would have an impact not only on persons whose jobs were directly affected, but also on their families and on the morale of remaining teams. The Division of Human Resources, in consultation with the Global Staff Council, was sparing no effort to provide support services for affected colleagues. It was particularly encouraging to witness the continued dedication of the workforce to refugees, and to each other, even in the face of personal uncertainty.



128. The senior executive team was developing a comprehensive strategic framework on diversity, equity and inclusion to guide the efforts of UNHCR to build a safe and inclusive environment. It was also committed to achieving gender parity at all levels of the organization. In addition, a platform had been launched in January 2023 that permitted UNHCR offices to report on their compliance with international standards for physical disability. On 10 October 2023, World Mental Health Day, the High Commissioner had launched a new UNHCR mental health strategy in recognition of the fact that mental health and psychosocial well-being were critical for the overall well-being of the workforce.

129. Action was also being taken to strengthen the UNHCR culture of transparency and accountability, and to promote an environment in which everyone was empowered to report all forms of misconduct. Arrangements for enhanced protection against retaliation had been developed through the “Speak up” helpline, and through the establishment of a support desk for workplace issues that did not necessarily amount to misconduct. Priority was given to action to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. An updated global strategy had been launched in 2023 aimed at equipping and empowering UNHCR and partner teams and communities to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*