



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Fifty-sixth session

### Summary record of the 594th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 5 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Martabit..... (Chile)

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General debate (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.*

**General debate** (agenda item 4) (*continued*)

1. **Monsignor Tomasi** (Holy See) said that refugees in camps could engage neither in agricultural nor in income-generating activities and thus depended on the international community for food supplies. For several years, the lack of budgetary resources had led to food shortages that caused stunted growth in children; encouraged prostitution; or resulted in forced repatriation to areas that remained unsafe. To enable refugees to return to a normal life, it was crucial to implement local integration projects; continue cooperation between the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and devise development strategies that included both local populations and refugees, with the participation of the international community and NGOs.

2. The number of holding centres for asylum-seekers had mushroomed in Europe and elsewhere. The stigmatization of asylum-seekers as “irregular migrants”, “queue jumpers” and even “criminals” could lead to a dehumanizing and not disinterested simplification of the asylum-migration nexus. In order to prevent the systematic use of detention, it was imperative to weigh the consequences of deprivation of liberty, in particular for vulnerable groups, and to think of alternatives, taking into account the relevant Executive Committee conclusions and the UNHCR guidelines on detention of asylum-seekers. Efforts must also be made to ensure that the protection provided for in the context of cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination was really delivered, in conformity with international norms. The present challenge consisted in reducing the gap in living standards between developing and developed countries by addressing the economic and political issues that forced millions of persons to leave their homes in search of protection and a decent life.

3. **Mr. Mahiza** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his country fully associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the African Group. Since the success of the elections in Burundi, many Burundian refugees had volunteered to repatriate, but progress was hampered by the lack of resources, personnel and means of transport. UNHCR and the international community must strengthen their capacity to transport, receive and reintegrate returnees, for which activities there was currently a shortfall in funding. Moreover, criminal activities spread in the camps, in particular during the repatriation process, and close cooperation and coordination would be required to address that problem. In that connection, the European Union, which financed the security package, should fill the post of head of office that had been vacant for over a year. Owing to a shortage of funds for the repatriation exercise that had been scheduled to start in mid-October, most returning Congolese refugees were left to make their own arrangements. Concerted action would make it possible to assist those who had long been waiting to return home.

4. The quality of services in the United Republic of Tanzania continued to attract refugees bound for other countries, especially South Africa, Malawi and Mozambique; existing policies must be reviewed to curb that problem. At present, after the repatriation of 215,493 Burundians and the voluntary return of 10,000 Congolese refugees, his country hosted 508,893 refugees. While supporting the concept of development through local integration, for historical reasons the Government was unable to embrace it fully and could grant citizenship to a limited number of refugees only. It was regrettable that the international community did not share that concern.

5. The United Republic of Tanzania thanked Denmark for financing a three-year renewable programme launched in 2004 (natural resource management, water and sanitation, improved agriculture and vocational training for refugee and local populations).

The State further extended its appreciation to the European Union for financing protection capacity-building programmes that had already been in the pipeline. It depended on UNHCR to play its role in soliciting assistance for refugee hosting areas, especially when refugees returned to their countries of origin, and called on the international community and donors to support UNHCR. It wished to have the contribution that it and most other African countries had made by placing land at the disposal of refugees acknowledged. It looked forward to maintaining its excellent working relationship with UNHCR.

6. **Mr. Mbemba Fundu** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that he endorsed the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of African States. His country hosted 242,814 refugees from neighbouring countries and 412,661 Congolese refugees were found in different parts of Africa. Given that mass displacement was generally caused by armed conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo called on the international community to participate in efforts to establish an anti-war front to promote peace and democracy in Africa. His country had signed tripartite agreements with the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR on repatriation of Congolese refugees abroad. Considerable progress had been made with regard to the safe and dignified return of refugees from the Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic; the return of refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania was expected to start on 15 October 2005.

7. The Transitional Government envisaged signing agreements with other relevant countries and called on the donor community to provide urgent funding for programmes. Efforts were also being made to step up security in areas of refugee return and protect the rights of returnees. He called on the international community to support the implementation of the global plan for the reintegration of returnees through UNHCR. The purpose of the plan, which was currently being drafted, was to facilitate the transition from dependence on humanitarian aid to development aid and help refugees, internally displaced persons and local populations to become self-reliant.

8. No action had been taken to date on a census of the Angolan refugees who had come to the Democratic Republic of the Congo of their own accord or the issuance of identity papers to refugees. Contrary to the agreement concluded between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and UNHCR, UNHCR had conducted only one cursory census in a part of Lower Congo; it had also started repatriating 2,298 refugees who had taken up residence in Kasangulu. Conducting a census of all Angolan refugees was crucial to: identifying durable solutions; clarifying the status of Angolan refugees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; providing them with identity cards to ensure their protection; and devising an integration strategy for those who wished to stay.

9. **Mr. Mumba** (Zambia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Nigeria on behalf of the Group of African States. Zambia continued to enjoy relative peace and stability, which had enabled it to search for durable solutions for refugees, especially repatriation, mainly to Angola and Rwanda. After starting off on a slow note, the pace of the repatriation operation for Angolan refugees had picked up. Unfortunately, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which served as the main partner of UNHCR in transporting refugees, lacked the funds to repatriate each Angolan wishing to return home before the end of the year when the programme was scheduled to end. Given that repatriation was the best solution for refugees and there were no impediments to their resettlement in Angola, Zambia urged the international community to step up support for UNHCR and IOM to enable them to complete the repatriation operation. Otherwise over 20,000 refugees would be forced to return home without any assistance.

10. The repatriation of Rwandan refugees remained a difficult exercise, despite the restoration of peace and stability in Rwanda. The Zambian Government reiterated its call

for the cessation clause to be invoked for Rwandan refugees, given that they no longer required the protection provided under the relevant conventions. The peace process under way in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was encouraging and UNHCR should cooperate closely with the Government of that country to establish conditions in the Northern Katanga region that were conducive to refugee returns. That way, assistance could be provided for refugees from Zambia who currently returned home without any support. That situation was particularly difficult for women and children and caused unnecessary tension on the border, where refugees stayed longer than necessary.

11. Zambia would follow closely the developments in mainstreaming the Convention Plus initiative, which provided the framework for the implementation of the Zambia Initiative, and trusted that such development-oriented programmes would not be sidelined on the ground that, UNHCR had traditionally been responsible for providing emergency relief. Zambia supported the creation of the post of assistant high commissioner for protection, which would enhance the role of UNHCR in overseeing States' implementation of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees through the use of protection tools such as the Agenda for Protection.

12. **Mr. Sherov** (Tajikistan) said that, at the beginning of 2000, Tajikistan had been host to some 4,500 refugees mainly from Afghanistan; between 2002 and 2005, approximately 2,000 of them had repatriated. To facilitate the implementation of refugee legislation, the immigration authorities had introduced a computerized system for registering refugees and asylum-seekers in cooperation with UNHCR. Refugees were granted freedom of religion, access to education, freedom of movement and opportunities to engage in economic and social activities. There was ongoing cooperation between a committee of Afghan refugees, the immigration authorities and the UNHCR office in Tajikistan.

13. Tajikistan had adopted specific policies to deal with the scale and diversity of labour migration flows. The controls of migratory flows focused on ensuring respect for the legitimate rights and interests of migrant workers in Tajikistan and abroad. In 2002, the Tajik authorities had launched a programme on legal and social protection for Tajik citizens working abroad on a temporary basis. It was designed to regulate migratory flows and prevent irregular migration. In October 2000, Tajikistan had concluded an agreement with the Russian Federation on economic activities and rights of Tajik citizens in the Russian Federation and of Russian citizens in Tajikistan. Creating a support centre for asylum-seekers would be an ideal way to settle issues relating to that group. He reiterated the request made by the Tajik Minister for Labour and Social Welfare to UNHCR in that regard.

14. **Ms. Whelan** (Ireland) said that she associated herself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. In order to promote tolerance in society and among individuals, Ireland had launched the National Action Plan Against Racism in January 2005 to clear up the confusion about the concept of asylum. She welcomed the proposals to make UNHCR the lead agency in the protection of internally displaced persons, who in the past had often fallen between the cracks of the United Nations system. Ireland was hopeful that leadership in that area would improve the coordination of efforts to ease the plight of the displaced and make the response of United Nations agencies more consistent and predictable. Ireland looked forward to effective cooperation with relevant actors outside the United Nations system. It would welcome additional information on the measures envisaged to ensure that the new responsibilities would not detract the UNHCR from its core mandate of protecting refugees.

15. Ireland attached priority to gender equality and was conscious of the prevalence of violence against women in situations of conflict and displacement. In that connection, she welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the High Commissioner's five priorities for refugee women. Ireland supported the proposal to appoint an assistant high

commissioner for protection. It would contribute US\$ 13 million to the UNHCR 2005 budget, thus doubling its 2001 contribution; over 75 per cent of the contribution came in the form of unearmarked funding. Ireland also supported the move towards needs-based programme planning and budgeting and the steps taken to develop a results-based management system.

16. **Mr. Dumont** (Argentina) noted with concern that there was a resurgence of humanitarian crises requiring the involvement of humanitarian organizations, especially in the area of internal displacement. Given the complexity of the migration phenomenon, a comprehensive approach to refugee-related issues and migration was needed to make a clear distinction between the responsibilities of IOM and UNHCR. The Argentine Government was particularly sensitive to the problem of security and called on States to ensure that measures taken to address security issues did not undermine the institution of asylum and were based on respect for judicial guarantees and international norms relating to human rights and refugee protection. The violence against both United Nations staff and refugees warranted special attention. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the training provided for UNHCR staff on security issues. His delegation furthermore supported the decision to create a post of assistant high commissioner for protection.

17. The deteriorating refugee situation in Latin America in recent years was a source of growing concern for UNHCR. On 5 August 2005, honouring a commitment made to UNHCR, Argentina had adopted a law to strengthen refugee protection. The swift adoption of that law was important, as it helped standardize current practices; strengthen international cooperation; and create an institutional framework for the activities of the key entities responsible for local integration of refugees. At the regional level, the launching of the Mexico Plan of Action would enable signatory States to work together on resettlement activities. The Argentine institution responsible for refugees had already started to receive requests from resettlement candidates currently residing in Ecuador and Costa Rica.

18. **Ms. Nyatanyi** (Rwanda) thanked the international community for the substantial assistance provided for some 46,000 refugees in Rwanda, most of whom came from the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. It was to be hoped that the improvement in the security situation might facilitate the voluntary repatriation of those refugees in the near future. The Rwandan Government considered voluntary repatriation the only durable solution for refugees and would participate in efforts to integrate those who were unable to return home.

19. She recalled the efforts made by the Rwandan Government since 1994 to repatriate over 3.3 million Rwandan refugees who had fled the genocide. Recently, Rwanda had provided assistance to facilitate the repatriation of refugees who had fled to Burundi after certain rumours had been spread; all of them had now returned to their regions of origin. Rwanda relied on the active participation of UNHCR, the international community and refugee hosting countries in promoting the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees and their socio-economic reintegration in Rwanda. She urged UNHCR to continue its appeals to the donor community to support the reintegration of repatriated refugees by providing assistance with housing, education, access to drinking water, health care and income-generating activities. She reminded the international community and Rwandan refugees that, despite certain delays in the repatriation process as well as budgetary constraints, the conditions in the country were conducive to repatriation. She reiterated her Government's request to UNHCR to invoke the cessation clause in the UNHCR Statute in respect of Rwandan refugees, since the situation of insecurity that had engendered their flight no longer obtained.

20. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia) thanked the High Commissioner for his words of condolence and solidarity with Indonesia in the aftermath of the bombings in Bali on 1 October. His gratitude also went to the delegations that had voiced their sympathy and their

support for the Indonesian Government and the victims. His Government particularly appreciated the speedy and important contribution made by UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in the wake of the unprecedented tragedy that had hit Asia on 26 December 2004. UNHCR had made a further contribution during the rehabilitation phase based on a memorandum of understanding it had signed with the Indonesian authorities in June 2005. The generous assistance provided by international organizations, Governments, civil society and individuals from around the world had been vital in preparing the ground for the Indonesian Government's own reconstruction effort.

21. Indonesia recognized the need to enhance the provision and implementation of international protection for refugees, who were a particularly vulnerable segment of the population. His Government believed, nevertheless, that care and sensitivity were needed to avoid possible abuses of the international protection regime, especially when dealing with mixed migration flows. His delegation recognized the urgency of addressing the problem of refugees and displaced persons also from the perspective of the Millennium Development Goals, especially by enhancing coordination between relief and development efforts.

22. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile) said that Chile welcomed the action taken by UNHCR in the area of protection. Chilean foreign policy was firmly rooted in the principle of human rights protection and refugee and related issues such as internal displacement were among its key priorities. Chile and other South American countries had established a joint refugee resettlement programme in cooperation with UNHCR. Although still relatively small, the number of refugees in Chile had doubled over the past three years and that trend was expected to continue. The implementation of the resettlement programme had allowed the Government to identify areas that needed improving. Expediting the procedure for determining refugee status was crucial. Furthermore, education programmes for border officials must be complemented with campaigns to heighten public awareness of the plight of refugees. Chile was also exploring various options proposed by UNHCR to facilitate the resettlement of refugees, including the adoption of a programme to support the creation of microenterprises.

23. **Mr. Kamara** (Sierra Leone) thanked UNHCR for its support in the repatriation of some 280,000 Sierra Leoneans and its efforts to assist with vulnerable residual caseloads, in particular unaccompanied minors, after the end of the repatriation exercise in December 2004. He further welcomed the work of the United Nations Country Team in promoting the "4Rs" approach (repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction) in order to ensure the sustainable return of refugees to their communities before the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone withdrew from the country at the end of 2005. His delegation welcomed the support provided for the 54,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone. The process for their repatriation, which had commenced in October 2004, was expected to pick up pace after the elections. The Governments of the Mano River Union had spared no effort to establish a framework for peace and put an end to the cycle of violence in the region. He called on donors and relevant institutions to support those initiatives. In that connection, Sierra Leone thanked the European Union, UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross for supporting the Government's efforts to intern and repatriate 435 former combatants who had fled the Liberian conflict. The joint action taken by national and international institutions had not only helped to maintain the civilian nature of refugee camps, but had also ensured Sierra Leonean neutrality in the Liberian conflict and reduced the prospects for recruitment of mercenaries and for small arms proliferation.

24. Like other countries in the subregion, Sierra Leone continued to face major challenges (good governance, inadequate economic infrastructure, unemployment among former combatants and young persons, food security) and relied on transitional funding to support reforms and restore lasting peace in the subregion. In that context, he appealed to donors to support action on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of Sierra Leone, together

with efforts to follow up on the recommendations contained in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report on reparation for war victims and the efforts of the Special Court for Sierra Leone to combat impunity in the subregion. He reiterated his Government's commitment to international instruments that provided the legal framework for the protection of refugees and thanked bilateral and multilateral donors and international financial institutions for their assistance.

25. **Mr. Rincón Gautier** (Venezuela) said that much had been done for refugees under the mandate of the current President, Mr. Chávez Frías. In particular, an article enshrining the right to asylum and refugee status (art. 69) had been added to the Constitution, and legislation on refugees and asylum-seekers that had been promulgated in October 2001 provided for the establishment of the National Commission for Refugees (NCR). The Commission, which had been established in August 2003, was the only institution authorized to process asylum and refugee status applications. Venezuelan refugee and asylum policy was founded on the principle of non-discrimination. Furthermore, instead of building camps, efforts were directed towards including refugees in social programmes such as literacy education; primary and secondary education; vocational training; access to higher education; health-care services; professional training and food security.

26. As many displaced persons had fled Colombia and taken up residence in Venezuela illegally, the Government had launched a programme entitled "Mission Identity", through which some 500,000 Colombians had been naturalized and given residence status to facilitate their integration into Venezuelan society. During the first half of 2005, the National Commission for Refugees had received 5,708 applications for refugee status. Venezuela was firmly committed to improving the quality of life of all those who were residing in its territory pending their safe and dignified return to their countries of origin.

27. Recalling that the Latin American and Caribbean region had some 3 million displaced persons and refugees, the Venezuelan delegation urged UNHCR to increase the annual budget for its regional office headquartered in Venezuela so as to ensure that sufficient funds were available to implement its community support and integration programme, in particular in the border regions. Venezuela welcomed the efforts of Colombia to protect internally displaced persons. Information about emergency relief programmes in place would be useful for preventing displaced persons from moving into neighbouring countries such as Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela.

28. **Mr. León Gross** (Spain) said that his country participated actively in conflict settlement and endeavoured to strengthen the credibility and efficiency of multilateral institutions, while fully assuming its responsibility in promoting a more just and secure international order. In that context, Spain reiterated its commitment to UNHCR as the only body responsible for refugee protection. His delegation endorsed the main lines of action presented by the High Commissioner in his opening statement and shared his concern about rising intolerance in modern societies. In that regard, Spain had called for the launch of the initiative known as the "Alliance of Civilizations"; the Secretary-General of the United Nations had supported the initiative by bringing together a group of eminent persons entrusted with the formulation of a practical plan of action to promote dialogue. As Spain had seen a large influx of migrants, it agreed with the High Commissioner that eliminating irregular migration networks was crucial to safeguarding the principle of asylum and protecting asylum-seekers.

29. Spain welcomed UNHCR plans to pay greater attention to the issue of displaced persons, in close cooperation with other humanitarian organizations, and would support any relevant initiatives. However, the new responsibilities should not undermine the UNHCR core mandate or affect resource allocation. The Government of Spain valued the opportunity to cooperate with UNHCR in Colombia and was pleased that Governments in the region were committed to finding solutions to the refugee problem and displacement in

a spirit of solidarity, as illustrated by the adoption of the Mexico Plan of Action in 2004. Spain was gravely concerned about the situation of Saharan refugees in the Tindouf camps and urged UNHCR to do its utmost to improve living conditions there, in particular through registration exercises. The measures announced by Morocco, on the other hand, were encouraging, especially the implementation of a programme to build confidence between the various parties concerned. Lastly, Spain reiterated its unconditional support for UNHCR and paid tribute to UNHCR staff who, often at risk to their lives, spared no effort to find durable solutions to refugee problems.

30. **Mr. Markotić** (Croatia) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. However, he wished to provide additional information on the situation of refugees and property restitution in Croatia. Since 1995, 335,909 persons, including 217,865 displaced persons (65 per cent Croats and 35 per cent ethnic Serbs) had returned home. Based on the number of return applications and housing requests from refugees that continued to reside abroad, an estimated 25,000 were expected to return to Croatia shortly. Less than 1 per cent of the 19,289 lodgings taken in the country remained occupied and the property restitution programme was drawing to a close. Those who had been unable to repossess their property within the legally prescribed period had been compensated. Furthermore, the Government would to its utmost to accede promptly to the housing requests of the 8,948 persons waiting to return to their regions of origin. The Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development would purchase apartments at market prices and allocate substantial resources to the Programme of Social Subsidized Housing (POS), which should be concluded by the end of 2006. Furthermore, 136,380 housing units that had been destroyed during the conflict had been rebuilt; 70 per cent of the beneficiaries were ethnic Serbs.

31. He called to mind that, in early 2005, the Governments of Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro had signed a declaration in which they had committed to providing the remaining refugees with a definitive solution through return or local integration by 2006. On 22 July 2005, the Croatian Government had adopted a road map that included activities to facilitate the return of refugees to Croatia; rebuild housing; develop infrastructure; and clear mines in areas of return.

32. **Mr. El Aghbash** (Sudan) thanked the High Commissioner for his visit to the Sudan from 22 to 25 August 2005 to evaluate the refugee situation on the ground. The Sudan greatly appreciated the efforts made by UNHCR to find durable solutions to the refugee problem. Over the past 40 years, the Sudan had received over 1 million refugees and had cooperated closely with UNHCR to ease the plight of displaced populations. The Sudanese authorities firmly believed that voluntary repatriation was the best solution for refugees and urged the international community, especially donors, to support repatriation programmes in eastern Sudan, where many Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees had taken up residence. The grave nature of the situation in the region hampered the Government's efforts to meet the basic needs of the population; the Government had even been forced to cut food rations for refugees, in flagrant violation of the relevant WFP and World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. His delegation therefore urged donors to ensure more regular food supplies for refugees.

33. The Sudanese Government had always been committed to environmental restoration of refugee-affected areas, but the UNHCR programme of Sustainable Options for Livelihoods Security in eastern Sudan had not been implemented with requisite swiftness. The Sudanese Government therefore called on donors to release funds urgently to finance the programme.

34. When speaking about Sudanese refugees, mention must also be made of Sudanese citizens who had fled to neighbouring countries to escape the conflict in southern Sudan, especially Darfur. That was a high priority issue for the Government. The signing of the



peace agreement between the Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement on 9 January 2005 and the establishment of the Government of National Unity created conditions conducive to the repatriation of Sudanese refugees. UNHCR and the international community must respect their commitments and take urgent measures for the voluntary repatriation of those refugees, especially by releasing the necessary funds and restoring resettlement areas through mine clearance activities, among others. His delegation was grateful to UNHCR for extending programmes originally intended for refugees to include displaced persons. Its gratitude also went to organizations and friendly countries, especially Kenya, Nigeria and Chad, which had supported the Sudan during the lengthy peace negotiation process.

35. The Sudan was committed to finding an early solution to the situation in Darfur, ensuring that Sudanese nationals who had fled to Chad could return to their former lives, which had been a model of peaceful coexistence between tribes. To that end, the international community must exert pressure on the rebels to: take a more flexible approach to the negotiations; respect the ceasefire; end the hostilities; and stop intimidating the population.

36. **Mr. Aleinik** (Belarus) said that refugee, migration and asylum issues were transnational issues and thus required multilateral cooperation. In 1996, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had launched the Geneva Process on refugees, displaced persons, migrants and asylum-seekers so as to address the new circumstances that had arisen following the demise of the Soviet Union, with the assistance of IOM and UNHCR. In that framework, a high-level conference bringing together relevant international organizations and CIS member States that was scheduled to take place in Geneva on 10 October 2005 would examine current problems relating to those issues. Belarus supported that initiative. The establishment of a coordinating body within that framework would facilitate a more flexible and effective response to the dangers posed by refugee and migratory flows in the former Soviet republics and elsewhere. Also, result-oriented and transparent cooperation between the CIS member States and the European Union, under the guidance of UNHCR and other relevant international organizations, would contribute to solving the problems of refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers on the Eurasian continent.

37. Belarus was concerned about statements made by certain countries that used the UNHCR mandate as a cover for facilitating asylum for persons involved in terrorist activities, without prior consultation of the States concerned. On issues as sensitive as refugee or asylum issues, it was imperative to respect the UNHCR founding principles of political impartiality, objectivity and neutrality. Therefore, the views of UNHCR member States must be taken into account when deciding on future activities. His delegation supported the proposal to appoint an assistant high commissioner for protection.

38. **Mr. Soufan** (Lebanon) said that, of the three durable solutions promoted by UNHCR to address refugee problems, local integration was the option with the most serious implications and consequences. That concept was not applicable everywhere and in all situations, especially when the survival of some host countries was at stake. It was his Government's belief that local integration was not a matter for joint action by States, but was rather a sovereign and voluntary act taken by the host country, which would have to bear the consequences. The State decision on local integration was a matter of feasibility rather than generosity. In Lebanon, a compromise would be feasible to accommodate UNHCR. Although self-reliance of refugees was a key concern, it should not be conceived as a necessity in order to improve national economies, even if it minimized to a certain extent the burden placed on host countries. Although refugees were victims of persecution and impunity, measures to address their plight must not be at the expense of justice and the viability of host States.

39. Consequently, Lebanon continued to consider voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution. While the right to political asylum was enshrined in legislation, for a number of social, economic and demographic considerations and against the backdrop of the massive presence of Palestinian refugees on its soil, Lebanon could not accept local integration on its territory per se. It appreciated UNHCR understanding in that regard. In September 2005, the Lebanese Government and UNHCR had agreed on amending their memorandum of understanding to expand the scope of international protection, which could be useful for many Iraqis and some 1,300 asylum-seekers.

40. **Mr. Martinez Martinez** (Mexico) said that, failing other options, refugees must be given the means to earn their livelihood and integrate into the host country. Economic and social development was crucial to assisting refugees and internally displaced persons and Mexico therefore strongly supported needs-based budgeting, which would inform the international community's cooperation efforts in the context of burden and responsibility sharing. The transition to a biennial budget similar to the arrangement at the United Nations would facilitate activities of planning and programming.

41. In the light of the current difficulties arising from the Convention Plus initiative, Mexico wished to know how UNHCR intended to integrate the principles of that initiative into its activities in practice. With regard to the multilateral framework for irregular secondary movements, Mexico was of the view that a compromise could be reached if the concept of protection were clearly defined. In the absence of such a definition, certain States might shirk their responsibilities flowing from international refugee law. At the same time, if mixed flows were made a priority, it was important to keep sight of the mission and responsibilities of UNHCR. The problem of refugees and internally displaced persons on the one hand, and the phenomenon of economic migration on the other, were two inherently different issues, both in terms of the relevant international instruments and the responsibilities of the competent international organizations. The activities and objectives of UNHCR must remain focused on the identification and protection of refugees and displaced persons and be guided by the sincere desire to offer them due protection, regardless of considerations relating to the management of migration flows or geographic data. When negotiating on general conclusions and other instruments and on refugee management, UNHCR and States should also draw from international human rights instruments enshrining the principle of *non-refoulement*.

42. **Mr. Trojan** (European Commission) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. He called to mind that the European Community spent around 600 million euros per year on humanitarian intervention in over 60 countries on all continents, thus reaching from 40 to 50 million persons. The long-standing and extensive relations between UNHCR and the European Commission had deepened considerably over the past few years. Furthermore, the European Commission had a long-standing financial commitment to UNHCR activities and was one of the organization's largest donors.

43. Registration was the core of protection and must receive all the support necessary. The European Commission welcomed the progress made by UNHCR to strengthen capacities in that area; efforts must now be made to ensure the sustainability of the process. He welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Surge Protection Capacity Project, which had proved an effective instrument in reinforcing UNHCR country programmes with protection officers. However, those measures were not substitute for the creation of permanent posts. The vast majority of refugees remained in their regions of origin in circumstances of extreme poverty and questionable safety. The European Union had the duty to ensure that people were able to have access as quickly as possible to protection that best met their needs. The European Union would continue to support and enhance protection capacity in regions of origin, including through a proposal for regional

protection programmes, which comprised a voluntary resettlement programme. UNHCR experience with the Convention Plus initiative was going to be extremely useful in that respect.

44. The first phase of the establishment of a common European asylum system would soon be completed. There was now a body of legislation aimed at creating a level playing field for asylum in Europe. But the European Union wanted to go further. It was setting out to establish a system comprising a common asylum procedure and a uniform status for persons in need of international protection by 2010. That objective could only be reached with a clear picture of the functioning of the current system; assessment of the role of UNHCR would be vital in that regard.

45. **Mr. Cabrera Hidalgo** (Ecuador) said that his country had always searched for durable solutions to humanitarian crises in the context of international solidarity and burden sharing. In that spirit, it had adopted and implemented the Mexico Plan of Action, which would enable the region to take a leading role in the development of international refugee legislation. Rather than establishing refugee camps, his Government gave priority to complementary protection measures and local integration. It also supported regional resettlement efforts. His Government was concerned about the changing international climate that had resulted in a progressive reduction in humanitarian action. At present, there were obvious double standards at play: on the one hand, there was talk of burden sharing, on the other hand, measures were being taken to further limit access to certain countries or groups of countries. As a result, the effectiveness of legitimate international protection was being undermined. It was clearly unwise and unrealistic to take a one-size-fits-all approach to the issues of refugees, migrants or even international crimes such as trafficking in persons or terrorism.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*