



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.605
13 December 2006

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 605th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 5 October 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. FUJISAKI (Japan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
(agenda item 5) (continued)

(a) INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION (continued)

1. Ms. NIELSEN (Switzerland) said that Switzerland's new Alien Act and revised Asylum Act contained a number of measures to regulate Swiss migration policy. Asylum legislation had been amended to combat abuse of the asylum system and to solve problems regarding the repatriation of persons whose applications had been refused. Victims of persecution would continue to receive protection in Switzerland. Efforts were being made to ensure that refugees were as self-sufficient as possible, and integration principles were contained in the revised Asylum Act. The new provisions of the Act specified integration modalities, including language learning, professional development and health-care measures. The Act facilitated the process of finding accommodation, integration into the labour market and access to professional training. It also took account of the specific needs of women, children and adolescents.

2. Switzerland was endeavouring to strengthen protection capacities in host countries through bilateral and multilateral exchanges, and it supported the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Swiss Government was co-funding a project to develop refugee management capacity in Kenya. Her delegation wished to know how UNHCR intended to develop the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, and what role the Office would play with regard to European Union initiatives.

3. The conclusion on women and girls at risk could contribute to the development of effective protection measures for that particularly vulnerable category of refugees. The conclusion on statelessness would increase awareness of the problems caused by statelessness and would enable UNHCR to act more effectively to solve them.

4. Ms. AUCOIN (Canada) said that States bore the primary responsibility for ensuring the physical and legal protection of civilians, and the international community should provide the necessary support in that regard. Continuing forced displacement and new cases of refoulement revealed the gap that existed between Governments' commitments and actions. The international community must continue to increase protection and assistance for forcibly displaced persons and find durable solutions to their suffering. It must also determine the best way to address mixed migration in order to distinguish between those who needed protection and other types of migrants. The Office's new responsibilities in the area of camp management and protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs) must not be detrimental to its core mandate of refugee protection.

5. Canada supported efforts to identify strategies to solve protracted refugee situations. Durable solutions required close cooperation and systematic and integrated approaches by all stakeholders. Efforts to prevent protracted refugee flows should draw on the conclusions and other tools developed by the Executive Committee and build on lessons learned from past operations. Border security concerns must not adversely affect the provision of asylum to those in need. Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board was developing an action plan and would

issue guidelines on procedural assistance for vulnerable persons who were unable to present their own cases. Canadian courts referred to Executive Committee conclusions, which should be substantive and advance the protection agenda.

6. Ms. EKLUND (Sweden) said that UNHCR played a crucial role in ensuring that international protection was provided to those who required it, and the international community must ensure that the Office was able to fulfil that role. Her delegation commended the UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action to Address Mixed Migratory Movements. Sweden commended the holding of informal consultations before the drafting of the Executive Committee's conclusions, and looked forward to continued consultations on the nature and value of protection conclusions. It was important to increase the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in informal consultations.

7. Protection was the key objective in the development of a common European asylum system, which would be based on the full and inclusive application of the Geneva Conventions and would set common standards for a fair and efficient asylum procedure. Asylum applications should be processed in a fair manner and in accordance with international law. A credible and legitimate system for those in need of protection must not be undermined. In that regard, public support was of utmost importance.

8. Mr. HUGHES (Australia) said that his delegation welcomed the two conclusions before the Executive Committee. The conclusion on women and girls at risk had been long overdue, since women and children constituted a very large proportion of the people living in camps managed by UNHCR and were particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The conclusion should serve as a platform for practical action by UNHCR and States to ensure significant improvements in the physical protection of that group. Since 1989, Australia had operated a targeted resettlement project for women at risk, as a result of which over 7,000 women and their children had been resettled. In 2005, Australia had exceeded its record for resettling women at risk. All States that operated resettlement programmes should consider introducing targeted arrangements for women at risk.

9. Australia also supported the conclusion on the prevention and reduction of statelessness. It was unacceptable that significant populations remained stateless for historical reasons, and that there continued to be laws and practices by which States arbitrarily deprived their nationals of citizenship.

10. Australia welcomed the Office's emphasis on resettlement and supported the decision to establish the UNHCR Resettlement Service. He expressed concern that the full benefits of those initiatives would not be felt if the senior resettlement position was unreasonably overloaded with other functions.

11. Civil society had a vital role to play in all protection issues worldwide. In Australia, the University of New South Wales Centre for Refugee Research had made a significant contribution to the development of the conclusion on women and girls at risk, and the organization Austcare had developed a pool of rapid response protection officers to assist UNHCR and other agencies in the field in meeting the protection needs of refugees and IDPs.

12. Ms. NEDERLOF (Netherlands) commended UNHCR on its efforts to meet the need for protection worldwide. Refugees should be able to find protection as quickly as possible and as near as possible to the place from which they had fled. The Netherlands was involved in the development of a European Union programme for regional protection and in 2007 would participate in a pilot programme in the United Republic of Tanzania, in cooperation with UNHCR. Voluntary return was the preferred durable solution to protracted refugee situations, and cooperation between UNHCR and other peace and development agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, was essential.

13. Her delegation welcomed the Office's attention to IDPs, which reflected needs and realities in the field. The Netherlands was pleased that UNHCR was taking the lead role with respect to protection, shelter and camp coordination and camp management. Efforts should be made to involve NGOs as full partners in the cluster approach.

14. Special attention should be paid to refugees moving in mixed flows in order to safeguard access to protection and asylum and ensure the rapid identification of people in need of protection. Her delegation supported the 10-Point Plan of Action and looked forward to further discussions on that subject.

15. Ms. SAUERBREY (United States of America) said that the Office's growing protection responsibilities in increasingly dangerous environments required greater partnership with member States, international organizations and civil society. Protection responsibilities were increasing as more IDP populations were included among the populations of concern to UNHCR. Although the Office had demonstrated its capacity to manage that responsibility during the crisis in Lebanon, her delegation was concerned that UNHCR might not be fully prepared to increase its staff and programmes on a scale necessary to respond to long-term crises involving large numbers of refugees and IDPs. She urged UNHCR to share a strategic plan with member States on the decision-making process, parameters for action, donor expectations and financial requirements.

16. Partnership was paramount for ensuring respect for the principle of non-refoulement. Her delegation was deeply concerned at the recent refoulement of Uzbek refugees, and she called on the Government of Uzbekistan to desist from demanding the forcible return of Uzbek refugees from other States.

17. Further efforts were required to assure the security and neutrality of refugee camps. Her Government was committed to finding ways to protect refugees and humanitarian workers in Chad. All member States should increase their capacity for refugee resettlement as a key form of protection. She welcomed efforts to increase protection for stateless persons as well as for refugees in protracted situations. Refugees, particularly women and girls, should receive both legal and physical protection. Her delegation supported the Office's efforts to hold all staff, including senior managers, accountable for implementing the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy.

18. Her delegation commended the increased cooperation between UNHCR, civil society and development actors, since protection concerns could be significantly reduced by developing partnerships between refugees and host communities. The United States recognized the

important role of UNHCR in addressing the asylum-migration nexus and assisting States in screening asylum-seekers in order to determine those in need of protection. The United States continued to support the Protection Surge Capacity Project and the creation of additional permanent protection posts.

19. Mr. CABRERA HIDALGO (Ecuador) said that his delegation welcomed the positive comments in the Note on International Protection on Ecuador's progress in raising awareness of the issues of gender and age in asylum procedures. Specific procedures had been established for the protection of women, girls and unaccompanied minors, and there were special programmes for the provision of psychological and social support for refugees in camps. Ecuador welcomed the adoption of the conclusion on women and girls at risk.

20. Ms. GUETIN (France) said that her delegation fully supported the Office's programmes to address the asylum-migration nexus and to facilitate voluntary repatriation and reintegration. Her delegation welcomed the inter-agency approach used by UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Democracy Fund to address the problem of statelessness. She requested further information on plans to revive the High Commissioner's Forum.

21. Mr. ELING (Observer for the European Community) said that efforts were being made to ensure that the second phase of the development of the common European asylum system did not weaken protection standards. UNHCR had an important advisory role to play in that regard. His delegation agreed that capacity-building for protection was not simply an issue for developing countries. Persons and organizations dealing with irregular migration should receive training in international law and asylum procedures.

22. Ms. HIRATA (Japan) commended the protection work carried out by UNHCR. Japan had provided financial support for projects in the Darfur region of the Sudan and in Ecuador. The Japanese Government believed that protection and empowerment were crucial for finding durable solutions. At the national level, Japan was a host country that received and protected an increasing number of refugees. A Japanese version of the Agenda for Protection had been published and would be used by Japanese stakeholders and civil society.

23. Mr. SHIRAZI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that resettlement was crucial for strengthening the refugee protection system and promoting international burden-sharing. In that connection, it was regrettable that resettlement activities had declined to the point that only 248 refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran had been resettled in 2006. The international community should give Afghan and Iraqi refugees and other asylum-seekers living in the Islamic Republic of Iran the opportunity to resettle. In view of the large-scale and protracted refugee situation in developing countries, UNHCR should introduce more flexible resettlement criteria.

24. Mr. MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ (Mexico) said that his Government had reservations about some aspects of the 10-Point Plan of Action, particularly with regard to secondary irregular movements and the promotion of a broad migration management approach. In some parts of the Plan of Action, it appeared that the Office was exceeding its mandate. UNHCR should take care not to set a dangerous precedent based on one region of the world. There was a need for dialogue between member States and UNHCR concerning the content and implementation of the Plan.

25. Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco) said that, despite numerous requests by UNHCR to conduct a census of the refugee camps in Tindouf, the Algerian authorities had refused to comply. In 1982, in a clearly dishonest attempt to obtain funds from the international community, the Algerian Government had stated that there were 165,000 refugees in the camps. In 2005, UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) had reviewed the figures, and had urged Algeria to allow them to conduct a census. While Morocco was grateful to donor countries for their efforts to relieve the suffering of the people living in the Tindouf camps, there was a risk that funds would be diverted as long as the exact number of refugees in the camps remained unknown. The European Union, UNHCR and WFP had reduced their assistance to the camps following several inspection missions, the reports of which had not been published. The international community should take measures to inform the people living in the camps of the real situation in their country of origin. To date, over 8,000 persons had voluntarily returned to Morocco, and it was time to end the forced exile of the people remaining in the camps.

26. Mr. ABDOULAYE (Observer for Chad) said that his Government attached high priority to protecting the over 200,000 Sudanese citizens in refugee camps in Chad. Police had been deployed to maintain order and provide security in and around the camps. He thanked the United States and UNHCR for their assistance in protecting the refugees living in the camps.

27. Ms. CROWE (Franciscans International) said that UNHCR played a crucial role in providing refugees with accurate information on the conditions, safety and resources available in areas of return, and facilitating and coordinating return movements. Measures should be taken to resolve the funding and staffing constraints that had limited the Office's ability to maintain a significant protection presence for returning populations. While she supported recent efforts to find a durable solution to the situation of Burmese refugees in Thailand and the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, she stressed that the Governments involved should endeavour to resolve the political issues that had resulted in the protracted displacement of those communities.

28. She shared the High Commissioner's concerns about the increasing use of asylum, migration and security issues for political gain. The perpetuation of the view that refugees and asylum-seekers were illegal immigrants or agents of insecurity, terrorism and crime eroded public support for refugees, encouraged racism and xenophobia and undermined the institution of asylum. The lack of fair and effective asylum procedures, durable solutions and physical protection in countries of first asylum forced refugees to move on in search of protection. States should adopt a rights-based approach to migration management and open legal channels for migration, including by signing and implementing the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. In developing border control measures to manage mixed flows, States must ensure that such measures included clear guarantees of the human rights of migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and others in need of protection.

29. The increasing use of resettlement as a protection tool did not absolve States from their primary obligation to protect asylum-seekers. Resettlement should focus on those with the greatest protection needs, and not those with better integration prospects or those who met the demands of national labour markets. She welcomed the increased recognition of the value of self-reliance in developing refugees' economic and social capacity to meet their essential needs on a sustainable and dignified basis. Self-reliance was desirable even where durable solutions were not immediately available, particularly in protracted refugee situations, and should be

understood as a precursor to a durable solution and not as a solution in itself. Marginalized groups for whom self-reliance might not be an option, such as people with disabilities and the elderly, should be given special assistance.

30. Between 165,000 and 200,000 Saharan refugees continued to remain forcibly displaced in refugee camps in western Algeria. Their protection had been undermined by annual cuts to the UNHCR budget for camps, where refugees had limited opportunities to earn a livelihood. Since food insecurity led to sexual exploitation and violence, she urged the members of the Executive Committee to adhere to existing commitments to ensure food security for refugees.

31. Many urban refugees fell into a “protection gap”, since they did not have access to a legal status or to basic economic, social and cultural rights. States should commit themselves to respecting and protecting the rights of all urban refugees in their territories, particularly such vulnerable refugees as women, children and the elderly. She urged UNHCR to publish and implement its urban refugee policy document without delay.

32. Child protection programming should be incorporated into the delivery of all services in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, the provision of high-quality education was crucial to meeting the protection needs of children affected by armed conflict and natural disasters.

33. The draft conclusion on the protection of women and girls at risk provided a blueprint for effective responses to individual women and communities. Every day, women and children were raped, babies were born as a result of rape and young girls died in childbirth. Little was known about the impact of bearing children of rape on the integration experience of refugee women following resettlement or repatriation. The international community should respond to the needs of refugee women and their children born of rape, and Governments should ensure that refugee women and children had access to a range of appropriate protection measures.

34. Millions of Palestinians fell into a protection gap with no access to any form of international protection. Palestinian refugees in Iraq were particularly vulnerable. All actors should redouble their efforts to address that problem.

35. While UNHCR was continuing its operations in Iraq with a number of NGO partners, it required additional resources to meet the protection needs of returnees and IDPs.

36. She commended UNHCR on its publication of comprehensive guidelines on procedural standards for refugee status determination. However, not all UNHCR offices were currently implementing those standards and there was a need to redress the gaps between UNHCR policies and human rights standards.

37. Mr. IBRAHIM (Sudan) urged all partners to ensure that adequate civilian protection was provided for Sudanese refugees in Chad. Further military activity in the Darfur region should be prevented. The Sudan required assistance to develop its capacity to protect the large number of refugees that it was hosting from neighbouring States. Many of those refugees wished to return to their countries of origin and should receive the necessary assistance to do so.

38. Ms. FELLER (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that UNHCR recognized the need to examine the reasons for the declining numbers of asylum-seekers. Over the coming months, the strategic use of resettlement for specific situations and refugee data protection would be discussed in UNHCR and with States. Returns to Kosovo would be reviewed in the first quarter of 2007. While the Office appreciated Switzerland's support for the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project, UNHCR was concerned at recent developments in the Swiss asylum system. Canada's asylum system, particularly its refugee status determination authority, had provided a valuable example of best practices.

39. She thanked Australia for its project on women at risk, which provided a safety net for women in need of rapid resettlement. The University of New South Wales Centre for Refugee Research had made a vital contribution to the conclusion on women and girls at risk.

40. The head of the new Resettlement Service would be directly responsible for dealing with aspects of resettlement as well as voluntary repatriation and local integration.

41. UNHCR wished to ensure the greater involvement of NGOs in the cluster-led approach. At the global level, more than 20 NGOs were participating in the protection cluster. NGOs had been encouraged to play a more active role in drafting documents and policies in the global cluster, in particular those relating to camp closure strategies, and had made a valuable contribution to the preparation of the Handbook on IDP Protection. At the field level, UNHCR would welcome the greater involvement of NGOs in needs assessment and global strategy development.

42. She thanked the United States for supporting UNHCR activities and for its advocacy work. She looked forward to the possible participation of the United States in the drafting of guidelines on providing security in refugee camps in Chad.

43. UNHCR considered the Mexico Plan of Action as a key policy for the Latin American region. Every effort would be made to find adequate resources to implement the Plan, which would focus on resettlement.

44. She welcomed France's interest in the re-establishment of the High Commissioner's Forum, which could be used for a constructive discussion of some of the policy issues that she and the High Commissioner had raised in their introductory statements.

45. She commended the programmes that had been developed by some European Union countries to address the phenomenon of mixed migration. Synergy between those programmes and the asylum-migration nexus would be encouraged in forthcoming discussions on the 10-Point Plan of Action.

46. She agreed on the importance of translating the Agenda for Protection into local languages and encouraged other States to follow Japan's example.

47. The Islamic Republic of Iran had expressed concern regarding fewer resettlement opportunities for Afghan and Iraqi refugees. In that regard, she wished to point out that, in recent years, such opportunities had actually increased, although selection criteria were still

being discussed by the Working Group on Resettlement. UNHCR was committed to establishing more programmes for Iraqi refugees. Resettlement programmes for Afghan refugees were mainly for women at risk.

48. She understood Mexico's reservations concerning some aspects of the 10-Point Plan of Action, particularly the issue of secondary irregular movements. The Plan was currently being considered by the Protection Reference Group and would subsequently be the subject of broader discussions, possibly in the High Commissioner's Forum.

49. She agreed with Morocco's comments concerning the key role of numbers in planning protection and assistance responses and of confidence-building measures to promote the early return of refugees.

50. She reassured Chad and the Sudan that UNHCR would ensure the physical security of refugees by reinforcing security around camps, increasing the number of gendarmes, and monitoring the situation more closely.

51. It had recently been suggested that further dialogue should be held on how to expand NGOs' protection relationship with UNHCR, the central theme of which would be the need to update Protecting Refugees: A Field Guide for NGOs.

52. Mr. RINCÓN (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), supported by Mr. UDDIN AHMED (Bangladesh), endorsed the comments made by the representative of Mexico concerning the 10-Point Plan of Action, particularly with regard to secondary irregular movements. The matter should be taken up in formal discussions and not merely posted on the Internet.

53. Mr. MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ (Mexico) said that the 10-Point Plan of Action should have been discussed prior to its posting on the Internet.

54. Ms. CROMPTON (New Zealand) said that her delegation was in favour of establishing a senior position for the Resettlement Service. She wished to know whether responsibility for IDPs would be transferred to another department.

55. Mr. BESSEDIK (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, against all evidence and the will of the international community, Morocco continued to assert that Western Saharan refugees were Moroccan nationals, even though Morocco was not even recognized as the administrative authority for Western Sahara. In its capacity as an observer and host country to the refugees, Algeria had consistently demonstrated its willingness to cooperate in efforts to reach a settlement. In that connection, he pointed out that pre-registration exercises had been conducted by UNHCR under the auspices of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Moreover, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had accused Morocco of attempting to alter the demographic composition of the electorate. The referendum on self-determination could take place only in the context of a global settlement. Other fundamental aspects of the question, such as the violation of the Western Saharan people's right to self-determination, must not be overlooked. The worst human rights violation was foreign occupation. The allegation that international aid had been diverted had not been confirmed by any of the representatives of NGOs or international organizations, including WFP.

56. Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, for 30 years, Algeria had been manipulating the population of the Tindouf camps for political purposes. According to a number of human rights observers, including Amnesty International, the military zone in which the refugees were being held made their integration into the local community impossible. The people in the camps had no freedom of movement and were arrested by Algerian military personnel when they attempted to leave. However, the main obstacle to a settlement was Algeria's refusal to allow a census - a statutory condition and practical requirement for planning and providing humanitarian assistance. Clearly, the reason for that refusal was the fear that the international community would discover the extent to which international aid had been diverted as well as the real intentions of the Algerian Government, which had nothing to do with humanitarian considerations.

57. Mr. BESSEDIK (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, said that it was not a question of the Algerian authorities refusing to conduct a census, but rather of the Moroccan Government's determination to modify the demographic composition of the camps by insisting that the census should not be part of the global settlement.

58. Mr. LOULICHKI (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, said that, in view of his experience in MINURSO, he was better qualified than his Algerian counterpart to comment on the situation. None of the relevant United Nations resolutions made any reference to the occupation of territory. His Government was calmly waiting for the Algerian Government to agree to settle the matter once and for all. He could provide documentation indicating that there were more than 1 million displaced persons in Algeria.

59. The CHAIRMAN said that, since the representatives of Algeria and Morocco had exercised their right of reply twice, he could not allow them to make any further statements on the same subject.

60. Ms. TSHERING (Observer for Bhutan) said that, during the debate, reference had been made to Bhutanese refugees. That term was incorrect and its continued use would prejudice the outcome of negotiations under way between the Governments of Bhutan and Nepal.

61. Ms. FELLER (Assistant High Commissioner for Protection) said that responsibility for IDPs had been entrusted to the Deputy Director of the Department of International Protection. A redistribution of responsibilities was currently under consideration, and it was possible that the IDP global cluster involvement function would be phased out.

62. She wished to make it clear that the 10-Point Plan of Action was merely a more structured way of addressing the migration-asylum nexus and related issues, such as capacity-building. All those issues had already been considered by UNHCR, including in its Agenda for Protection.

63. In reply to the Observer for Bhutan, she said that the term "refugees" had been used for many years. The main concern was to find an appropriate and speedy solution to a protracted situation.

(b) PROGRAMME BUDGETS, MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT (continued)

64. Ms. CHAMBERLIN (Deputy High Commissioner) said that in 2006 the Standing Committee had held productive discussions on a number of issues concerning the management of UNHCR. The overarching management objectives would become more accountable, transparent and efficient in the Office's management practices.

65. As the first step towards the adoption of results-based management as the dominant management culture for UNHCR, the 2007-2009 Global Strategic Objectives (GSOs) had been introduced to instruct managers in the preparation of their budget submissions. That meant that the Office had begun the 2007 programme planning and budget process with a clearer idea of what it intended to achieve. One lesson learned was that greater use could be made of the GSO framework as a guide for budget priorities. One way of reinforcing budget prioritization was to develop standard instruments. The Country Operations Plan and Country Report for 2008-2009 were being redesigned for that purpose.

66. A second major step forward was the development of UNHCR FOCUS, a results-based management software program. The program would enable UNHCR to incorporate a number of important functions into one global information management tool. That would collect baseline data from country programmes in a global database; record standards and indicators developed through the participatory planning process or needs-based assessments; define targets at the performance and impact levels; create results-based budgets that reflected the costs of achieving results; and monitor progress in achieving results. FOCUS would dovetail with other existing software programs to complete the renovation of the Office's management information technology. The next step would be to pilot the new FOCUS software in 2007, with global implementation scheduled for 2008. The full implementation of the results-based management planning and reporting tool would go a long way to increasing transparency, efficiency and accountability.

67. According to the participatory needs assessment that had been carried out in 2006, the total needs of refugees and persons of concern amounted to approximately US\$ 2.35 billion. Of that amount, there would be an estimated shortfall of over US\$ 760 million, which made it impossible to programme a needs-based budget. The participatory needs assessment was important because it identified beneficiary needs that enabled the Office to make judicious allocations on the basis of priorities.

68. Under the Management Systems Renewal Project, the Finance and Supply Chain modules were currently functioning in 100 field locations in Asia, Europe, Casawame and the Americas; field implementation in Africa would be completed by the end of 2007. The human resources module had been implemented in 15 field locations; implementation of the Payroll module would begin on 1 January 2007. Over a four-year period, management reforms in the Division of Information Systems and Technology had resulted in a savings of US\$ 6 million. The ProGress technology for registration was being implemented in 151 locations in 47 countries.

69. The Division of Human Resources Management was developing a workforce strategy designed to achieve greater flexibility, particularly with regard to appointments and postings. The Office was establishing a roster of staff with appropriate skills to assume IDP cluster leadership roles. It was also setting up an assessment process for senior managers, and its legal office was taking steps to ensure timely, cost-effective and fair disciplinary procedures. New mechanisms had been developed to improve communication with staff on compliance with rules. Compliance with the Code of Conduct was mandatory and all staff must complete an online training course on the prevention of workplace harassment. The Office was in the process of finalizing a comprehensive gender policy.

70. By 2011, 10 per cent of UNHCR funding was expected to come from the private sector. Incentive-based fund-raising had been introduced to encourage country representatives to develop private sector fund-raising strategies and retain those funds for their local programmes. A web-based awareness and fund-raising campaign called “ninemillion.org” had been introduced.

71. After serious difficulties in early 2006, the financial situation of UNHCR had stabilized. The High Commissioner had instructed managers to minimize the impact of spending cuts on refugees by cutting back on non-essential travel and conferences and postponing procurement where possible. An additional US\$ 20 million had been saved through cuts in travel, temporary assistance, consultants and external recruitment, especially at headquarters. A number of headquarter posts had been eliminated. The favourable foreign exchange market was expected to result in a net exchange gain of some US\$ 20 million, and approximately US\$ 12 million would come from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. If donor contributions were forthcoming, the target in private sector fund-raising would be met and, if the favourable exchange rate continued for the rest of the year, UNHCR would be able to eliminate any shortfall between income and expenditure.

72. Ms. POLLACK (United States of America) commended UNHCR for its responsible management of the difficult financial situation at the beginning of 2006. It was important to ensure that budget programming was based on the needs of beneficiaries. She encouraged the Office to continue its efforts to improve the participatory needs-assessment process. Transparency in needs assessment and relevant budget allocations was crucial to increasing donor confidence and support. Donors must receive detailed information on the use of supplementary programme budget allocations; if such budgets were carried over into a second fiscal year, donors must be informed as soon as possible of associated financial requirements. Her delegation looked forward to the forthcoming discussions regarding the possible inclusion of supplementary programme budgets in the annual programme budget.

73. The establishment of a robust, result-based management culture would bolster confidence in, and support for, the work of UNHCR among its partners, beneficiaries and staff. Her delegation welcomed the Office’s progress in establishing relevant objectives, indicators and targets. The Structural and Management Change process, the transition to results-based management, transparency in needs assessment and budgetary issues, strong financial management and the successful mainstreaming of key information technology initiatives were absolutely critical to the success of the Office’s management efforts.

74. Ms. NORTON (Canada) said that the financial difficulties of the past year had hampered the Office's capacity to provide protection. Members of the Executive Committee must collectively ensure that UNHCR had the means to fulfil its mandate. In 2006, Canada had contributed Can\$ 31.2 million to UNHCR operations and had provided the WFP with funds specifically earmarked for refugees and IDPs. Canada was also an important donor to the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. It also provided strong political and diplomatic support and had an active resettlement programme.

75. Structural reforms and modern management practices were crucial to meeting the challenges facing UNHCR. Reforms should be promoted to ensure aid effectiveness, transparency, accountability and optimum allocation of resources. UNHCR must be able to respond in a reliable and efficient manner to the needs of persons of concern. It was important that senior management remained firmly committed to reform, and that the Executive Committee fully supported the reform process. UNHCR should make every effort to build a strong evaluation function.

76. Canada commended the Office's progress made in the area of gender equality. Accountability at every level was crucial to the successful implementation of the Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy, and she was pleased that an accountability framework had been agreed on with senior management. Canada strongly supported the adoption of the draft conclusion on women and girls at risk.

77. While the adoption of supplementary budgets for IDP-related activities helped to protect resources earmarked for refugees, that method would not be viable in the long term. However, before supplementary budgets could be mainstreamed, UNHCR must provide the Executive Committee with information on IDP-related activities and their impact on the Office's core mandate.

78. She was surprised that, in the 2007 budget, operations in Africa had been reduced in the same proportion as other UNHCR operations. In that connection, Canada welcomed the proposal to establish a budget committee, which would contribute to improvements in financial planning, resource allocation and control. She commended the Office's efforts to strengthen partnerships with other United Nations agencies and NGOs.

79. Mr. WEBSTER (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) welcomed the steps taken in 2006 to address the problem of the widening gap between the Office's expenditure and its income. Results-based management and participatory needs assessment should facilitate the transition from resource-driven to needs-based planning. His delegation commended the progress made in the structural and management review. In order to enable UNHCR to assume its new IDP responsibilities, donors and member States must increase their financial support.

80. Mr. BRAANAAS (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, called on UNHCR staff, members of the Executive Committee, observers and donors to support the High Commissioner's reform efforts. Flexibility, efficiency, adequate funding, and needs-based budget programming were of paramount importance. Restructuring would improve the Office's protection capacities and its efficient use of resources and fund-raising capabilities, which would enable it to assume its new IDP responsibilities.

81. The Nordic countries welcomed the Office's greater involvement in the global response to IDP situations. Given its specific competence and capacity, UNHCR was well placed to help IDPs. Pending the mainstreaming of IDP-related activities into the annual programme budget, it might be useful to establish a special fund-raising mechanism for IDPs in order not to undermine the Office's ability to assist and protect refugees. He wished to know when the trend towards spending more of the Office's resources on support activities than on operations would be reversed.

82. For many years, the Nordic countries had called for a needs-based budget. However, given the amount of available resources, many of the needs identified in the 2007 budget would not be met. All donors must therefore assume their responsibility for meeting the most acute needs.

83. Mr. BECK (Germany) said that there was a clear relationship between the Office's current reform process and its increasing role in the field of IDP protection. In that connection, he wished to know how cost-efficiency gains and the decreasing refugee population would free resources for IDP programmes. Future activities must be based on reliable figures and a sound IDP policy. In the interest of financial clarity, Germany supported the inclusion of supplementary programmes into the regular budget.

84. Ms. HIRATA (Japan) commended the Office's reform efforts, particularly its measures to increase budget allocations for field operations, ensure greater flexibility in human resource management and enhance partnerships with NGOs. She urged UNHCR to take particular note of the shortcomings identified in the report of the Board of Auditors (A/AC.96/1025) as well as the Board's recommendations.

85. Ms. DABO (Africa Humanitarian Action) said that her organization was concerned about the cuts in funding for humanitarian assistance. Assistance to refugees must be based on accurate needs assessments rather than on the availability of resources. Unless UNHCR moved towards needs-based budget programming, assistance and protection for persons of concern would remain inadequate.

86. Over the past year, there had been a marked improvement in relationships between NGOs and UNHCR, particularly with regard to the management of subproject agreements and rational resource allocation for activities. Although UNHCR was operating on a smaller budget, more realistic programme planning had improved efficiency. However, overheads, ceilings on expatriate salary costs and the timely provision of UNHCR in-kind asset contributions continued to cause concern and a more flexible approach must be adopted in those areas.

87. Indigenous NGOs experienced particular difficulties in accessing the necessary funding to develop their response capacity. Project funding alone was insufficient to sustain NGO activities, and she encouraged UNHCR to move away from a narrow project approach and

recognize the importance of a flexible programme approach with non-earmarked grants for institution-building. A mutually beneficial grants framework agreement between UNHCR and its NGO partners could serve as a model for other United Nations specialized agencies in their partnerships with NGOs.

88. The NGOs involved in the implementation of the Mexico Plan of Action, and specifically the development of regional resettlement programmes, were in dire need of funding. The failure of some donor States to honour their pledges had delayed implementation of the resettlement programmes, and she urged UNHCR and its donors to take urgent measures to address that situation.

89. She supported the adoption of the draft conclusion on the protection of women and girls at risk and urged donors to allocate resources for its implementation.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.