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Fifty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 603rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 4 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.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. RINCÓN (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela fully respected the right to asylum and guaranteed access to fair asylum procedures conducted by well-trained officials. Given the current increase in asylum-seekers and the massive influx of refugees from Colombia over the past four years, the Office's refugee-related activities were of vital importance to persons in need of international protection and to persons living in host communities.
2. His Government had introduced a number of social programmes with a view to preventing social exclusion and facilitating participation in public life. The programmes, which were also accessible to refugees and asylum-seekers, focused on such areas as literacy, education, health, vocational training, indigenous peoples, birth registration and nutrition. Under the Misión Madres del Barrio programme, homemakers in poor neighbourhoods received a monthly allowance equivalent to 80 per cent of the minimum urban wage.
3. The right to asylum was guaranteed in the Constitution. However, criminals must not be allowed to abuse that right in order to escape prosecution for serious offences. Persons who had been actively involved in the internal armed conflict in Colombia, including demobilized members of the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia, were therefore not eligible for asylum in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
4. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela applied the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and domestic legislation as the basis for determining a person's refugee status. A clear distinction was made between refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Once refugee status had been granted, the applicant received a visitor's permit to facilitate his or her integration and prevent discrimination. His Government was prepared to share its experience in that regard with other interested delegations.
5. Ms. MAPISA-NQAKULA (South Africa) said that poverty and underdevelopment were the main causes of population movements in Africa. As a committed member of the African Union, South Africa played a role in conflict resolution, peacekeeping and the search for durable solutions. South Africa was hosting an increasing number of asylum-seekers, and was grateful for the support that it received from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to meet its protection obligations. Efforts were being made to integrate refugees and asylum-seekers into South African society by granting them access to employment, education and health care, including treatment for persons with HIV/AIDS. Her Government was committed to eradicating discrimination and was implementing programmes to raise public awareness about refugees' rights and their reasons for seeking refuge.
6. South Africa was cooperating with UNHCR in the Angolan voluntary repatriation programme, and intended to sign a tripartite agreement with Rwanda and UNHCR in the near future. Although the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained a challenge in Africa, the Office's IDP-related projects should not detract from refugee protection and

assistance. Her delegation noted with concern that financial constraints and the adoption of austerity measures had limited the Office's activities in Africa. In that regard, she called for greater spending in Africa, particularly for repatriation programmes.

7. South Africa welcomed any action to enhance the effectiveness of UNHCR. Administrative costs should not compromise field operations. Reform should be transparent and all stakeholders should be consulted.

8. South Africa welcomed the Executive Committee Conclusions relating to Statelessness. Efforts must be made to raise awareness of gender-based persecution and the specific needs of women in the asylum process. The South African Government would draw on the Office's expertise to improve training programmes for officers responsible for determining refugee status. UNHCR assistance was required to meet the challenges of mixed migration, particularly with regard to the asylum process. Her Government was concerned that the tendency for developed countries to negotiate readmission agreements with developing countries, which traditionally hosted the majority of refugees, could result in burden-shifting rather than burden-sharing.

9. Mr. TOMASI (Holy See) said that the hundreds of people who lost their lives while struggling to escape from war, human rights violations or famine were a reminder that the international community was failing to uphold its goals of solidarity and protection. While motives and flows were mixed, all those people were clearly in need of protection. The apparent reluctance to preserve the valuable distinction between migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees weakened the protection capacity of the relevant international and regional instruments. In the determination of admission, UNHCR participation and the implementation of specific guidelines could play a crucial role in ensuring that States did not question the right to asylum.

10. Greater awareness of the responsibility to protect should encourage additional efforts to alleviate the plight of asylum-seekers, who were often kept in a state of limbo. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees should be interpreted on the basis of protection needs, rather than political expedience. Additional resources were required to assist asylum-seekers and deal with protracted refugee and IDP situations.

11. In addition to resources, political will was also needed to prevent forced displacement. If dialogue and respect for human rights replaced conflict, there would be no need for refugee camps. For the time being, efforts must focus on repatriation, local integration and resettlement. Resettlement in developed countries offered potential benefits for both parties, since receiving States often experienced labour shortages and demographic problems. Non-governmental and faith-based organizations could provide valuable assistance in creating an environment conducive to resettlement. However, effective partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) required the allocation of sufficient resources to guarantee the viability and safety of their operations.

12. The initiatives to make UNHCR more effective and flexible, the new cluster approach and the reorganization of the budget demonstrated the organization's commitment to its humanitarian cause. Society at large should also renew its commitment to protection, solidarity and hospitality. Training of law enforcement and immigration officers and awareness-raising were important tools.

13. Ms. NGENDAHAYO (Burundi) thanked the Chairperson and the High Commissioner for their respective visits to Burundi in February and June 2006. The joint visit of the High Commissioner, the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) to the Great Lakes region in March 2006 had reaffirmed the importance of inter-agency cooperation. The visit to Burundi of the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees and members of the UNHCR Council of Business Leaders had highlighted the need for innovative partnerships between UNHCR and the private sector.

14. Over the past year, the Burundian Government had worked to strengthen its newly established democratic institutions. It had undertaken crucial reforms to strengthen respect for human rights in defence and security forces, the public and semi-public sectors and the judiciary. A special commission had been established to deal with land disputes; 600 political prisoners had been released; and further progress had been made in the demobilization of former combatants. Five thousand weapons had been handed over in the past three months, and in September 2006 a ceasefire agreement had been concluded with the last remaining insurgent group. Social measures included the introduction of free education and free health care for pregnant women and children under 5. All those initiatives would create a favourable environment for the sustainable reintegration of repatriated and displaced persons.

15. Prolonged droughts in several regions had had a disastrous effect on Burundi's economy. Fortunately, with the cooperation of the Tanzanian Government and WFP, food security had been re-established and the over 12,000 persons who had fled eastern Burundi in early 2006 had been able to return. The Government had reaffirmed its commitment to repatriation, return and resettlement as a key component of peace and reconciliation. After a one-year suspension, the tripartite agreement between Burundi, the United Republic of Tanzania and UNHCR on voluntary repatriation had been renewed. At its tenth session in November 2006, the Tripartite Commission would discuss such issues as the updated voluntary repatriation programme and the deportation of irregular migrants.

16. By late April 2006, the number of Rwandan asylum-seekers had reached 21,000. UNHCR had assisted Burundi in determining those persons' refugee status on the basis of the 1951 Convention. The examination of applications was nearly complete, and most persons concerned had returned to their country of origin. However, the continued presence of refugees placed a heavy burden on Burundi's economy. In that connection, she thanked resettlement countries, particularly the United States of America, for their support. The implementation of repatriation, resettlement and reintegration programmes in 2007 would require additional resources, and she trusted that UNHCR and donors would continue to assist her Government in easing the suffering of the Burundian people.

17. Ms. PICTET-ALTHANN (Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that Malteser International, the relief service of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta provided emergency relief worldwide. However, country operations were often severely restricted by unstable security environments. For example, the provision of basic health care to IDPs and residents in Darfur had been hampered by the virtual inaccessibility of certain areas, and the recent escalation of the conflict had further exacerbated the situation. Since 2001, Malteser International had provided humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and had carried out support programmes in

communities with particularly high return rates, in cooperation with UNHCR. While humanitarian and reconstruction needs remained high, the deterioration of the security situation in certain parts of Afghanistan made it difficult to continue operations. The death of three staff members had been a harsh reminder that the safety and security of humanitarian personnel was of vital importance. She urged the authorities in the countries concerned to do their utmost to protect humanitarian workers and enable them to carry out their mission.

18. She expressed concern at the protracted refugee situation on the Thai-Myanmar border. For over 20 years, ethnic minorities had been fleeing Myanmar. Because of their ambiguous legal status, those refugees relied on international assistance to meet their basic needs. Since 1993, Malteser International had provided medical assistance for up to 32,000 persons in two camps and was currently increasing its relief programme. The Project Coordinator of Malteser International communicated regularly with the UNHCR office in Bangkok.

19. Recent experience had shown that partnerships were critical to the success of the emergency response system, and her organization strongly supported the High Commissioner's commitment to joint action, both in the provision of emergency relief and when addressing transition problems after the emergency phase through relief, rehabilitation and development.

20. Mr. MARCH (Spain) said that the protection mandate of UNHCR currently extended to over 20 million refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and IDPs worldwide. His Government welcomed the High Commissioner's decision to assume greater responsibilities in addressing internal displacement situations. Practical experience and careful consideration would help define the Office's role in IDP protection, emergency shelter and camp coordination and management.

21. In recognition of the financial implications of the rising number of persons of concern to UNHCR, Spain's contributions would reach €12.5 million in 2006, which made it one of the Office's main donors. UNHCR should intensify its efforts to enhance coordination, which would help broaden the donor base and consolidate traditional donor support. He commended the High Commissioner for his balanced proposals on internal reform, the success of which was crucial to the sustainability of UNHCR and its capacity to adapt to changing realities.

22. His Government was particularly interested in UNHCR activities in Latin America. The solidarity and mutual assistance among the signatories of the Mexico Plan of Action should serve as an example for other countries.

23. It was important to manage and control migratory movements in order to prevent depopulation and intensify measures to combat trafficking in persons. Development cooperation and border controls were necessary to address the internal and external dimensions of migration. Spain was making considerable efforts to assist and protect refugees and asylum-seekers, even though the vast majority of migrants came to Spain for economic reasons. In 2006, Spain had intensified its cooperation with UNHCR in order to identify ways to deal with mixed flows. His Government welcomed the efforts made by UNHCR to find innovative solutions to the migration-asylum nexus.

24. Mr. THORNE (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the number of protracted refugee crises showed no sign of abating, and rapid onset emergencies and

ongoing conflicts continued to result in appalling human suffering. The situation in Darfur was particularly troubling and the international community must take action. He called on all parties to the conflict to cease all forms of violence and commit themselves to a lasting peace process. There had been a marked deterioration in protection levels in Central Asia, and the recent extradition of four Uzbek refugees by Kyrgyzstan and the closure of UNHCR offices in Uzbekistan were of grave concern.

25. Over the past year, UNHCR had taken proactive steps to find durable solutions to long-standing problems and to guarantee the legal, material and physical security of vulnerable persons. Many developing countries had made an invaluable contribution by bearing the immediate impact of protracted refugee situations. Steady voluntary returns in the Great Lakes region of Africa demonstrated the basic human desire to return home. The United Kingdom encouraged UNHCR to continue to strengthen its protection networks and partnerships with the development community.

26. There were over 23 million IDPs worldwide, 70 to 80 per cent of whom were women and children, whose protection was one of the international community's greatest challenges. The United Kingdom had long advocated a more predictable, transparent and accountable response to IDP situations and supported the implementation of the cluster approach and UNHCR responsibility for camp management, emergency shelter and protection for persons displaced by conflict. The provision of humanitarian assistance and international protection should not depend on whether a person had crossed an international border. To continue to make that distinction when designing programmes, activities and budget was to ignore the realities encountered by UNHCR staff at the operational level. The United Kingdom supported the mainstreaming of IDP activities and costs into the Office's annual programme budget.

27. Efforts to strengthen the international humanitarian coordinator system should be encouraged as the need for partnership increased. Further measures should be taken to strike a balance between the allocation of resources to headquarters and field operations in order to maximize delivery capability on the ground. UNHCR should closely examine its working practices and structures and maintain the momentum for internal change.

28. Mr. MUMBYKO (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the preservation of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was essential for the safe return of Congolese refugees. The re-establishment of peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would also consolidate the peace process in the Great Lakes region and enable refugees from neighbouring countries to return home. His Government thanked UNHCR for its support in the repatriation process. Although voluntary repatriation was the most appropriate durable solution to refugee situations, in some cases refugees were reluctant to return, or chose to integrate into their host community, which posed a challenge to the provision of protection and assistance. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which hosted some 230,000 refugees, faced both of those obstacles to voluntary repatriation. Further support was required in order to provide refugees with arable land and to build acceptable shelters. Considerable environmental damage had been caused by the large-scale presence of refugees in Congolese parks and nature reserves. He called on the international community to repair the damage to his country's natural heritage.

29. Although his Government was grateful to UNHCR, the international community and host countries who were facilitating repatriation, the return areas were unable to receive Congolese

returning from exile owing to the destruction of basic infrastructures. It was particularly frustrating to witness children, who had been educated in their host countries, turning to delinquency on their return because they were unable to attend school. Proper health care was not available either. His Government thanked the High Commissioner for his visit to South Kivu province, and donors who had continued to fund programmes for Congolese refugees. His delegation welcomed the fact that UNHCR had been chosen to lead institutional coordination in favour of IDPs. The Congolese Government wished to be included in all stages of the development and implementation of IDP programmes in its territory.

30. A clear distinction should be made between economic migrants and asylum-seekers in order to ensure that persons in genuine need of protection were not penalized. The proposed UNHCR reform should not alter the Office's vision or objectives, but should address the problems of resource mobilization, and meeting the basic needs of refugees.

31. Mr. ALEU (Sudan) said that, for over 40 years, the Sudan had hosted refugees from neighbouring countries. Those countries also hosted Sudanese refugees. Following the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees had been subjected to a cessation clause, as a result of which some had been voluntarily repatriated, while the majority remained in their host countries. Over the past two years, the Sudan had experienced new influxes of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees and, in some cases, the Sudanese Government had had to return those refugees to their countries of origin in order to diffuse conflicts that erupted between them and their local host communities. The cessation clause, which was political and donor-driven, did not support countries of origin and created problems for host countries. That clause was not humanitarian and contradicted the principle of voluntary repatriation. Although over 500,000 Sudanese refugees wished to return to the Sudan, their repatriation had not been possible because UNHCR did not have the necessary funds, and the 12,000 who had been repatriated had not received adequate assistance. The majority of the repatriated refugees had become internally displaced.

32. In the Sudan, neither refugees nor IDPs were receiving adequate support. Donor contributions were imperative to ensure the provision of appropriate protection. The Sudan was host to over 700,000 refugees, and had over 5 million IDPs in Khartoum, Darfur and southern Sudan. The Government was awaiting the voluntary repatriation of over 500,000 Sudanese refugees from the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. Although the Sudan deserved greater humanitarian attention, political and diplomatic considerations often overrode the humanitarian priority. Sanctions against the Sudan would not harm the Government but rather the common people, and the first victims would be refugees and IDPs. Sudanese refugees were returning from Chad, in order to avoid being forcibly recruited by armed groups that had rejected the Darfur Peace Agreement.

33. The Sudan should be among the first countries to benefit from the UNHCR reforms, and he called on UNHCR to investigate the refugee situation and monitor the Office's management of operations in the Sudan. UNHCR should introduce the use of results-based management software in the Sudan in order to address the situation in Darfur and meet the needs of returning refugees. The situation in Darfur could not be solved without a true understanding of African-Arab relations in the region. Any solution based on sympathy for Africans at the expense of the Arab tribes would be catastrophic. The solution to the Darfur conflict must be a Sudanese initiative.

34. Mr. MNATSAKANIAN (Armenia) said that, for the past 15 years, Armenia had cooperated closely with UNHCR to protect refugee populations and IDPs, ensure that they enjoyed the same basic rights as citizens of Armenia and develop and implement durable solutions through integration and naturalization. Efforts had been made to enhance capacity-building in the areas of protection and asylum. The Armenian Government had taken charge of the refugee and IDP situation, while UNHCR and other partners provided support and assistance. The concept of development had been placed firmly at the centre of refugee policies and was synchronized with Armenia's overall poverty-reduction strategy.

35. Naturalization and local integration policies would not be successful without the continued commitment of the donor community. Moreover, such policies required sensitivity and an understanding of the needs and concerns of former refugees. The High Commissioner's recent visit to Armenia had resulted in the identification of vulnerable groups that required special attention. Continued and enhanced dialogue was needed to adapt the joint agenda of Armenia and UNHCR to new realities.

36. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, in accordance with UNHCR policy, the use of exclusion clauses was an important element of the institution of asylum. His Office would work together with the international community to ensure that no mistakes were made when cessation clauses were adopted. UNHCR would focus its attention on the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers who were not officially recognized as such and were therefore unable to exercise all their rights. The international community should heed the call for support from countries that had successfully concluded peace agreements and were making the transition to democracy. Such countries required effective assistance to ensure their sustainable development and the return of their citizens.

37. The security of displaced populations and humanitarian workers was a priority for his Office. He paid tribute to the staff of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta who had been victims of violence.

38. While UNHCR had no influence over countries' asylum policies, it endeavoured to work with national authorities to identify persons in mixed migration flows who required protection.

39. The Office's work with IDPs would not undermine its focus on refugees. The Executive Committee should work to find the best budgetary mechanism to address the problems of internal displacement. He called for a system that facilitated the mainstreaming of budgets while ensuring that additional funds were available when new problems arose. International funding was needed to support a significant development effort in order to ensure that conditions were met for the sustainable return of refugees to southern Sudan. He appealed to the Government of the Sudan to focus its attention on security and protection in Darfur.

40. Ms. KAPPEYNE van de COPPELLO (Netherlands) said that, when defining and deciding on management reforms, including full implementation of results-based management, UNHCR should take account of the specific requirements and needs of its new role with IDPs.

41. Mr. KABWEGERE (Uganda) said that, after the political changes in Uganda in 1986, there had been some 600,000 Ugandan refugees in southern Sudan, about 50 miles from the

Ugandan border. Under the UNHCR repatriation programme, their return would have taken a long time. The Governments of Uganda and the Sudan had therefore agreed that the refugees should walk home, which had taken about six weeks.

42. Ms. PICTET-ALTHANN (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that UNHCR should include the situation of the refugees on the border between Thailand and Myanmar in its examination of refugees whose status was not officially recognized.

43. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) urged Bhutan, and Nepal, together with the international community, to find a solution to the refugee situation without dwelling on past problems and disagreements. On his recent visit to Thailand, he had concluded an agreement with the Government on the effective protection of refugees living on the border with Myanmar.

44. Mr. SESAY (Observer for Sierra Leone) said that the international community should continue its support of African States where conflict situations persisted. His Government supported the Office's role in the cluster approach, and welcomed the establishment of the Peace Building Commission, which would be particularly relevant in dealing with transition issues to consolidate peace processes in countries emerging from conflict.

45. UNHCR had provided valuable assistance in the repatriation and sustainable reintegration of many Sierra Leonean refugees, particularly unaccompanied minors and separated children. UNHCR, donor Governments and institutions should replicate the best practices in Sierra Leone in order to ensure that recently repatriated Liberian refugees were sustainably reintegrated into their communities.

46. The international community should closely monitor the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and the Mano River Basin in order to preserve peace in the subregion. Transition funding was needed to support economic and public sector reforms in countries emerging from conflict in order to enhance economic growth and sustainable peace in West Africa. His Government was keen on assuming its responsibility for protecting refugees, and it looked forward to the Office's support for a capacity-building plan for staff and the institutions that would be managing the refugee infrastructure. He urged all donors and partners who had pledged support for Sierra Leone in November 2005 to honour their commitments.

47. Mr. AL-SHIBIB (Observer for Iraq) said that the Ministry for Displacement and Migration had been established under the new political regime to alleviate the suffering of those who had been forcibly displaced. However, it required significant support from UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations in order to resettle and reintegrate the 5 million people who had been displaced in Iraq or were living abroad.

48. Mr. TROJAN (Observer for the European Commission) said that the past year had been a challenging one for UNHCR. Its rapid intervention in Lebanon and its ongoing operation in the Sudan were particularly commendable and had been supported by the European Commission.

49. In the delivery of humanitarian aid, UNHCR remained one of the European Commission's most important partners. The European Commission would continue to support

UNHCR within the budgetary constraints of its Financial Perspectives 2007-2013. It looked forward to the forthcoming strategic programming dialogue on priorities for cooperation in the provision of effective, high-quality and needs-driven humanitarian aid in 2007.

50. The European Commission welcomed the new responsibility assumed by UNHCR with regard to IDPs. The cluster approach could help to address humanitarian assistance gaps and improve delivery of assistance in the field. In order to be effective, that approach required the support of the broader humanitarian community. The Commission was currently considering how best to support the reform process and cluster approach through the next generation of its thematic funding.

51. The European Commission strongly supported UNHCR efforts to protect refugees in the broader context of migration. The European Union attached particular importance to protection as part of its asylum and migration policies, and cooperation with UNHCR in applying European Union legislation and devising strategies to be implemented outside the European Union was crucial. The 10-Point Plan of Action provided a good basis on which to build such cooperation.

52. The European Commission had recently allocated €45 million to support third countries in the area of migration and asylum in 2006; a substantial proportion of that sum would be committed to a joint action with UNHCR for building capacity in the area of asylum in all southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. Ways of providing financial support for UNHCR activities in the European Union were also being explored.

53. Ms. NOWA PHIRI (Observer for Malawi) said that Malawi currently hosted approximately 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, most of whom came from the Great Lakes region. More than 80 per cent of them lived in designated areas in the northern, central and southern regions of Malawi. However, Malawi had recently experienced an influx of irregular migrants, some of whom were economic migrants using Malawi as a transit country, while others were involved in trafficking in persons. The problem was how to distinguish between genuine asylum-seekers and irregular migrants. Asylum-seekers usually declared themselves at the border immigration offices, while irregular migrants declared themselves only when they were arrested for illegal entry.

54. Between January and August 2006, 1,600 asylum-seekers had entered Malawi; by the end of September 2006, only 200 of them had remained in the country. The Government of Malawi recognized the need for a well-articulated refugee policy and the amendment of its refugee legislation, and she requested UNHCR to provide assistance in that area.

55. UNHCR should continue its efforts to strengthen its donor base in order to carry out the activities under its mandate, including voluntary repatriation, which was one of the best solutions to the plight of refugees. She agreed that Rwandan refugees should be encouraged to return home voluntarily to assist in the development of the country; however adequate funds must be identified for that purpose.

56. She expressed her gratitude to the countries that had agreed to resettle refugees from Malawi. In particular, she thanked Sweden for allowing 15 refugees whose status had been revoked to be resettled in that country.

57. Mr. TCHARIE (Observer for Togo) said that in recent months there had been positive developments in the process of national reconciliation in Togo. One of the objectives of the new Government of National Unity was to continue the repatriation programme for refugees and displaced persons. The plan of action adopted in September 2005 provided for the re-establishment of security and measures to encourage the return of Togolese refugees and displaced persons. Such measures included information campaigns to raise public awareness of the return of Togolese refugees, the re-employment of refugees and displaced persons who had held posts in the civil service, and the establishment of nine committees to receive, follow up and assist the reintegration of returnees. There were also plans to open an office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and to establish an ad hoc committee to support repatriation efforts, which included contacting refugees who were reluctant to return from host countries with a view to expediting their repatriation. There were currently some 15,000 Togolese refugees in Benin and Ghana, as opposed to 43,000 in the wake of the violence of April 2005. UNHCR should send a mission to Togo to assess the situation. His Government's greatest desire was for all remaining refugees to return to Togo, and it hoped to conclude tripartite agreements with the Governments of Ghana and Benin and UNHCR in the near future.

58. Sustainable repatriation must be accompanied by substantial assistance for reintegration and he appealed to the international community and partners to support his Government's efforts in that area.

59. Mr. SOLANO (Guinea) said that, over the past 20 years, Guinea had hosted more than 2 million refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. There were also approximately 82,000 IDPs as a result of rebel attacks in 2000 and 2001, as well as Guinean refugees fleeing the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire or expelled from other countries. Only refugees had received regular assistance from the international community.

60. The restoration of peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia had permitted the voluntary repatriation of some 43,000 Liberian refugees, including 23,000 in recent months. However, the proliferation of light weapons, drug trafficking and insufficient measures to support the return and sustainable reintegration of displaced persons continued to be destabilizing factors. Only the political will and concerted efforts of all stakeholders could help to put an end to armed conflicts in the subregion. In that connection, his Government looked forward to the forthcoming subregional conference in Conakry on strengthening peace and security in the countries of the Mano River Union.

61. Greater support from the international community was required for Guinea's reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, particularly with regard to residual refugee groups. Under a local integration programme involving 1,300 residual refugees from Sierra Leone, 600 refugees had already been integrated in the communities of their choice. His Government would honour its obligations under international conventions relating to refugees. In particular, it would focus its attention on refugees who decided to remain in Guinea. Lasting solutions could not be achieved without greater cooperation, solidarity and burden-sharing.

62. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that Sierra Leone's efforts to achieve peace and stability and launch the development process were

commendable and the institutions that it had established inspired confidence. However, in view of the large number of returnees and refugees from neighbouring States, considerable economic support was required from the international community to ensure the sustainable repatriation of refugees and consolidate the development process in order to prevent a resurgence of violence.

63. He acknowledged the failure of the international community and UNHCR to address the plight of the millions of displaced persons in Iraq and abroad as a result of hostilities. The Office would review the situation and appeal to the international community for assistance.

64. The European Commission was not only the second largest donor to UNHCR but was also an important partner with which UNHCR had cooperated in connection with the European Union's asylum system and the migration-asylum nexus.

65. He commended Togo's efforts to achieve national reconciliation, and pledged UNHCR support for the repatriation of Togolese refugees.

66. He thanked the Government of Guinea for hosting refugees and called on the international community to support reintegration programmes for them. The international community should pay greater attention to the problem of residual refugees, particularly in West Africa.

67. Ms. TSHERING (Observer for Bhutan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the question of the people living in camps in eastern Nepal was a complex issue that had its origin in illegal immigration. The camps had been opened by the Government of Nepal, which had sought UNHCR assistance in 1991 when only 304 people had claimed to be Bhutanese refugees. Until mid-1993, all ethnic Nepalese claiming to be Bhutanese refugees had been admitted to the camps without proper screening, by which time the camp population had reached its current proportions. Her Government therefore did not understand why, despite written agreements between Bhutan and Nepal acknowledging that there were different categories of people in the camps, including non-Bhutanese, all persons living in the camp continued to be labelled as "Bhutanese refugees".

68. The Bhutanese Government was committed to finding a solution on the basis of its agreements with the Government of Nepal. The bilateral process had been very close to a solution when Bhutanese officials in the camps had been attacked in December 2003. The bilateral process had been disrupted by the subsequent deterioration of stability and security in Nepal. Despite those setbacks, Bhutan remained firmly committed to the bilateral process and to the agreements that it had reached with the Government of Nepal over many years of arduous negotiations.

69. Mr. MANAPAN (Thailand), speaking in exercise of the right to reply, said that the representative of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta had failed to recognize that Thailand had hosted large numbers of displaced persons from Myanmar for more than three decades and had worked closely and transparently with UNHCR and international organizations to provide adequate protection and assistance and find durable solutions for them. The representative of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta had also failed to acknowledge the Thai Government's efforts to improve the situation of displaced persons from Myanmar through the provision of access to employment, education and health care, and resettlement in third countries.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS ON THE WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

- (a) INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION
- (b) PROGRAMME BUDGETS, MANAGEMENT, FINANCIAL CONTROL AND ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT (agenda item 5) (EC/57/SC/CRP.27)

70. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the draft report of the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/57/SC/CRP.27). If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt the draft report.

71. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.