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Summary record of the 660th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 2 October 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Knutsson(Sweden)
later: Ms. Arango Olmos (Vice-Chairperson).....(Colombia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

General debate (continued)

1. **Mr. Djundev** (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that 1,577 persons, who were mainly from Kosovo and who required international protection, lived in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The strategy for integration of refugees and foreigners living in his country and the related national action plan detailed the activities and measures to be taken across all the sectors involved in the integration of refugees. The objectives of the local integration process were to integrate persons who had been granted asylum into the national welfare system, involve them in self-reliance projects, and provide them with legal assistance to obtain the legal status that they need to be able to fully integrate into their new society.
2. In 2012, the Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had established a joint project for the building of 20 social housing units. Parallel to the process of local integration, the number of voluntary repatriations was increasing, and 360 persons had benefited from assistance with repatriation to Kosovo between 2008 and 2011. In 2011, the authorities of Kosovo and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had continued to review a draft bilateral cooperation agreement to speed up the voluntary return of refugee families who wished to return to Kosovo. The Government was considering the possibility of acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
3. **Mr. Miranda Duarte** (Portugal) said that, on 1 October 2012, Portugal had submitted the instruments of accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
4. **Ms. Constantinescu** (Romania) said that Romania continued to fully support the activities of the Emergency Transit Centre in Timișoara, which afforded protection in emergency resettlement situations.
5. **Mr. Kovačič** (Slovenia) said that in the past year, Slovenia had contributed to UNHCR activities in the Sudan, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Slovenia continued to roll out the Project against Trafficking and Sexual and Gender-based Violence (PATs), which was co-financed by the European Refugee Fund and was designed to set up a mechanism to identify, assist and protect victims of trafficking and sexual violence.
6. **Mr. Finol** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had decided to grant refugees and refugee claimants access to free education and health care. In a recent development, refugees had also been given access to housing. The Government had made it easier for certain categories of vulnerable persons, such as female victims of sexual violence and persons suffering from cancer or HIV/AIDS, to be granted refugee status.
7. **Mr. Perović** (Montenegro) said that Montenegro, in cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, had undertaken to facilitate voluntary return and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). In that connection, it had held a donor conference in Sarajevo on 24 April 2012 to raise funds for a regional housing programme for vulnerable refugees and IDPs. In 2011, Montenegro, which hosted 12,000 refugees mainly from Kosovo, had adopted a durable solution strategy in which priority was given to improving the living conditions of displaced persons and IDPs, especially those living in the camps at Konik. Montenegro had granted permanent residency status to 5,059 foreign nationals.

8. **Mr. Owusu Acheampong** (Ghana) said that Ghana was finalizing its local integration policy, which would lead to more than 40,000 Liberian refugees being integrated in Ghana once the cessation clause was in effect.
9. **Mr. Zimba** (Mozambique) said that, despite limited financial and human resources, Mozambique had been hosting refugees since independence and that it was committed to implementing a local integration policy that would create jobs and thus enable all refugees, especially those with academic credentials, to participate in the local economy. In addition, Mozambique, with the assistance of UNHCR, had designed a template for a new refugee identity card that refugees should be able to use to exercise their fundamental rights more effectively.
10. **Ms. Tipping** (New Zealand) said that, in 2012, New Zealand had supported UNHCR operations in Turkey, Jordan and elsewhere. It had continued to welcome Bhutanese refugees and to work with UNHCR and other resettlement countries to set up a contact group for the resettlement of Colombian refugees.
11. **Mr. Anwari** (Observer for Afghanistan) said that, since 2002, nearly 6 million Afghan refugees had returned home, including more than 61,000 in 2012, and that the Ministry for Refugees and Returnees, in conjunction with UNHCR, had provided support to 4.7 million of them. There were 1.7 million registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan and nearly 1 million in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Ministry was crafting a national reintegration policy to facilitate the transition from emergency humanitarian assistance to sustainable development. Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and UNHCR had adopted the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees in order to find durable solutions to the Afghan refugee situation. Such a solution included support for voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance for host countries. The Afghan Government had issued nearly 135,000 passports to Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran and urged the Government of that country to increase the monthly quota of residency permits issued from 5,000 to 20,000. Lastly, the Afghan Government was developing a national policy to serve the country's 500,000 IDPs.
12. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) commended the various countries on the efforts that they had undertaken and on their support for UNCHR activities.
13. *Ms. Arango Olmos (Vice-Chairperson) (Colombia) took the Chair.*
14. **Mr. Coulibaly** (Observer for Mali) said that, owing to the presence of rebel groups in the north of Mali, more than 185,000 displaced persons had taken refuge in the regions of Mopti and Segou and the district of Bamako which were in a part of the northern occupied zone. Mali also hosted some 18,000 refugees representing 15 nationalities. It was regrettable that Mauritanian refugees in Mali were still not able to return to their country of origin, unlike the 4,000 Ivorian refugees who could do so since a tripartite agreement had been signed in August 2012 between Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and UNHCR.
15. **Mr. Gouandja** (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that the Central African Republic had been experiencing many security problems in recent years, owing to the presence of national and foreign irregular forces. In the interests of protection, the Government had set up a security perimeter in the east of the country, where the rebels were found. However, the measure made protected individuals more vulnerable, because most of them depended for their livelihood on agriculture, fishing or hunting. The Central African Republic had more than 20,000 asylum seekers whose status had yet to be determined by the authorities. As peace and unity had been restored in the north and north-west of the country, it was now possible to envisage the return of Central African refugees who had fled to southern Chad and Cameroon. As to the repatriation of Congolese refugees at the Batalimo camp, a study had been carried out there in September 2012 to prepare for their return.

16. **Mr. Ngueno** (Observer for Gabon) said he welcomed the fact that consultations between Gabon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR had helped to improve the situation of the thousands of Congolese refugees who had settled in Gabon since 1997, by enabling them to return voluntarily to their country, to obtain a residency permit or to receive confirmation of their status.

17. **Mr. Dawood Jassim** (Standing Committee Observer for Iraq) said that there had been 260,000 displaced persons in Iraq when the former regime had come to an end, as compared with the current figure of 168,000. In order to resolve that issue, measures had been taken to favour of local integration, return to the region of origin or resettlement. Every displaced family had received US\$ 3,500 by way of assistance, and affordable housing had been built. In-kind assistance had furthermore been provided to Iraqi nationals living in neighbouring countries. Despite all the difficulties arising from the regime change, notably social difficulties, Iraq had opened its borders to Syrian refugees and had allocated US\$ 40 million to assist them. Camps had been set up under army protection and significant progress had been made in granting refugees access to health care and education.

18. **Mr. Nduwimana** (Observer for Burundi) said that the Government of Burundi was considering the possibility of acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and withdrawing its reservations to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In Burundi, there were more than 50,000 refugees and asylum seekers, of whom approximately 25,000 lived in camps and 26,000 in urban areas. The challenges facing the country were the influx of asylum seekers from the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo since June 2012, monitoring developments in that region, the saturation of existing refugee camps and the urgent need to establish a new camp in early 2013. More than 500,000 Burundian refugees had been repatriated since 2002, but nearly 38,000 had refused to return home voluntarily, despite efforts by the tripartite commission of Burundi, UNHCR and the United Republic of Tanzania.

19. **Mr. Hannan** (Bangladesh) said that he would welcome further information about the new project to strengthen the emergency response capacity of 11 non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He said that UNHCR should limit itself to its role as an intergovernmental body. It was unfair to expect Bangladesh to continue to shoulder most of the burden of hosting and accommodating refugees from Myanmar. Local integration was not a viable option, given the socioeconomic situation in Bangladesh; therefore, voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution.

20. **Mr. Bairagi** (Standing Committee Observer for Nepal) recalled that Nepal had been providing shelter on humanitarian grounds to thousands of Bhutanese refugees for more than two decades. The Nepalese Government had not approved the Transitional Solutions Initiative for Nepal and would not approve it if the objective was local integration. The only solution was voluntary repatriation, which UNHCR should reflect in its future reports and publications.

21. **Mr. Aryasinha** (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that socioeconomic, nutritional and mortality indicators for IDP villages in Sri Lanka were deemed satisfactory by international standards. The village of "Menik Farm" had been very recently shut down, and returns of displaced persons to their homes had occurred in tandem with demining and demilitarization operations in former conflict areas. The former high security zones no longer existed and nearly 11,000 ex-combatants of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had been rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Thanks to Government investment in infrastructure and livelihood development, the growth rate in the Northern Province had topped 27 per cent in 2011.

22. **Mr. Tsiskaraskvili** (Observer for Georgia) said that Georgia was home to hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees and that, thanks to the efforts of the Government and UNHCR, durable housing solutions had been found for nearly 130,000 people. Parliament had enacted a new law on refugees and humanitarian status that brought national legislation into line with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In addition, Georgia had acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the Government supported the current process for transition from humanitarian aid to development assistance. However, no progress was being made in the Geneva international discussions on matters pertaining to the mandate of UNHCR. Moreover, the foreign military occupation of Abkhazia and Ts'khinvali was the main obstacle to the return of displaced persons.

23. **Mr. Prica** (Standing Committee Observer for Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that, with assistance from UNHCR, Bosnia and Herzegovina had achieved many of the goals set out in Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The main priorities for the region had been defined in the regional durable solutions programme for vulnerable refugees and IDPs, in which the country was taking part along with Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. The total programme budget was €584 million, of which €83 million would be provided by the countries of the region and the rest primarily by the international community. Confirmed pledges of more than €260 million had already been registered for the regional housing programme.

24. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner) welcomed the efforts undertaken by various countries, in particular those hosting Malian and Syrian refugees, and the support that they provided for UNHCR activities. He drew attention to the importance of cooperation between UNHCR and States and said that he would like to see more consultation with States.

25. **Mr. Puok Riek** (Observer for South Sudan) said that South Sudan had to contend with a new influx of approximately 210,000 refugees, most of them women and children, which had been caused by fighting that had erupted in the Sudan in early 2012. In addition to the lack of security in the border area between the state of Unity and Southern Kordofan, epidemics and malnutrition, which South Sudan lacked the means to address, had been reported among the refugee population.

26. **Mr. Ignatovich** (Observer for Belarus) drew attention to the imbalanced distribution of UNHCR resources among Central and Eastern European countries. He regretted that the agency had not alerted the international community to the imminent onset of humanitarian disasters, particularly in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, and that it did not condemn violations of the rights of refugees and stateless persons that were committed in Western European countries. The living conditions of refugees in European detention and holding centres were humiliating, and he urged the UNHCR office in Europe to conduct a regional study on the situation of refugees in the European Union and in Scandinavia.

27. **Mr. Mbodou Abdoulaye** (Observer for Chad) said that Chad was home to more than 400,000 refugees. The Government intended to put the activities of the Chadian police force (*Détachement intégré de sécurité*) on a permanent footing in an effort to maintain security in and around camps. Awareness-raising campaigns to encourage peaceful coexistence between host communities and refugees had been conducted, while a community development mechanism had been set up to facilitate decision-making in refugee communities and the issuance of identity cards and to ensure that the civilian nature of the camps was respected. Three tripartite meetings on finding durable solutions had been held between Chad, the Sudan and UNHCR, and the Governments of Chad and Cameroon, with the support of UNHCR, had undertaken to draft a tripartite agreement on repatriation of Chadian refugees living in Cameroon.

28. **Ms. Bhattacharya** (India) said she noted with concern that UNHCR devoted more than 70 per cent of its budget to dissemination and awareness-raising via the media, rather than to refugee protection, its core function. The Government of India strove to improve its legal and administrative mechanisms in order to provide better hosting arrangements for refugees by, for example, allowing them to earn a living during their stay in the country.

29. **Ms. Dolly Joiner** (Observer for the African Union) said that the security, humanitarian and food crises in the Sahel required immediate attention. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained a major concern for the African Union and the international community. In that connection, initiatives undertaken to implement the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Programme should be encouraged. She welcomed the economic agreements negotiated between the Sudan and South Sudan, especially those concerning oil resources management. She also welcomed the deployment of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Armed Forces in northern Mali. She expressed the hope that those developments would pave the way for the creation of a larger humanitarian space.

30. **Mr. Nelson** (Observer for Liberia) said that Liberia was facing numerous challenges, that were associated, inter alia, with voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees, the country's limited hosting capacity, the protection and safety of Liberian refugees who had chosen to settle in their country of asylum, and a lack of funding for reintegration of Liberian refugees. Moreover, in anticipation of the partial withdrawal of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) troops by July 2015, the Government would have to take on a greater share of the responsibility for Liberian and other refugees in the country.

31. **Ms. Ade Sogbossi** (Benin) said that Benin endeavoured to ensure the well-being of refugees, in part by conducting local integration campaigns among refugees, granting Beninese citizenship to those who applied for it, and developing assistance measures to encourage voluntary returns. However, despite such efforts, some long-term refugees had voiced their dissatisfaction in violent public demonstrations.

32. **Mr. Guterres** (High Commissioner), replying to the representative of Georgia, pointed out that UNHCR had acted as *amicus curiae* before the European Court of Human Rights in several cases involving European Union countries where the Court had found for the plaintiff.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.