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

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 591st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 3 October 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. MARTABIT (Chile)

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

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS
(agenda item 3) (continued)

Panel discussion on the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Inter-Agency Standing Committee reforms and the strengthening of the inter-agency collaborative response to internally displaced persons

1. The CHAIRMAN welcomed the panellists and invited them to open the discussion.
2. Mr. MBEMBA FUNDU (Democratic Republic of the Congo) commended the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for assisting countries affected by internal displacement in their efforts to cope with those situations.
3. At the Executive Committee's fifty-fifty session, his delegation had requested an extension of the UNHCR mandate with respect to internal displacement due to war. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was emerging from a highly complex crisis. In the absence of a national coordination framework and financial and human resources, tackling the large-scale internal displacement presented serious problems. Aware of its responsibility towards persons displaced by armed conflict, human rights violations or natural or man-made catastrophes, the Government intended shortly to establish an appropriate legal framework and create an interministerial body to coordinate the protection, social rehabilitation and retraining of internally displaced persons (IDPs). That body would act as a focal point for international actors working in the field. It would also be mandated to draft a bill providing for the integration of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in the national legislation.
4. His delegation was pleased to learn that UNHCR would be playing a leading role in the coordination of international action in support of his country's efforts for IDP protection, camp management and provision of emergency shelters. Its experience gained in cooperating with the Government to address the refugee situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be highly beneficial in that regard. However, the work of UNHCR must be part of broad inter-agency cooperation. An effective response to internal displacement also required action in the areas of health, education, safe drinking water and social reintegration. He encouraged UNHCR, in its cooperation with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to help strengthen the capacities of the national framework to be established. The new approach to inter-agency cooperation should also ensure greater involvement of local authorities.
5. In order to address internal displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo effectively, it was crucial to determine the precise number of IDPs, identify their needs with a view to ensuring their reintegration, and devise appropriate logistical approaches; for, while providing assistance to displaced persons in urban areas was relatively easy, logistical constraints made access to those living in remote areas difficult.
6. While his Government recognized its responsibilities towards internally displaced persons, five years of war had weakened national capacities and his country relied on the support of the international community. IDP camps were not a permanent solution; support for displaced persons must therefore focus on facilitating their return as soon as the security situation in their

communities of origin had improved. Consequently, a lasting solution depended on strengthening local capacities. The Government had taken a series of measures to consolidate peace and restore security, including the restructuring of the army and the national police and the creation of six special brigades to ensure the safe return of internally displaced persons. The Government had also undertaken to demobilize and reintegrate former combatants, with the support of international partners.

7. A tripartite commission composed of representatives from Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had been created to address the issue of foreign troops crossing national boundaries on the pretext of pursuing armed groups from their countries illegally installed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The establishment of the commission was part of an ongoing dialogue to resolve contentious issues between those three countries. His Government welcomed the support of the international community, in particular the United States of America, in that regard.

8. The Government had set an ultimatum for foreign armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to disarm voluntarily by 30 September 2005, after which date the national Armed Forces, with the support of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC), would disarm them by force.

9. Finally, the security situation in displaced persons' communities of origin, the great need for assistance to vulnerable groups, and the poverty in the areas of intervention were major challenges and required special attention.

10. His Government was deeply grateful to the international community for its unwavering support for his country's efforts to restore peace and security and make possible the participation of the entire population in the forthcoming elections, thus enabling the Democratic Republic of the Congo to regain the political, economic and social stability it needed to play its part in the concert of nations.

11. Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that improved inter-agency cooperation in addressing internal displacement was crucial to overcoming remaining obstacles and to further enhancing the effectiveness, cost-efficiency and predictability of an already well-functioning humanitarian system.

12. That system had made substantial progress in recent years: response capacity and agility had improved, in particular through the utilization of new technology, increased logistical capacities, and greater participation of donors, non-governmental partners and United Nations agencies. However, international efforts to address situations of internal displacement had been inadequate, as illustrated by the international community's failure to meet the needs of IDPs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The unpredictability of a system that worked well in some cases and lacked capacity and access in others must be remedied. To that end, a reform agenda had been formulated within the framework of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which sought to strengthen the response capacity of humanitarian organizations at the local, national and international levels, with UNHCR playing a leading role. The reform proposal also aimed at establishing a more predictable funding mechanism to jumpstart emergency operations and at improving cooperation. In that context, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee had also

proposed to reform the Central Emergency Response Fund. Provided approval by the United Nations General Assembly was forthcoming, the new arrangements would take effect in early 2006. The additional funds would go towards facilitating a faster response to IDP crises and ensuring a more equitable system.

13. Internally displaced persons were among the most neglected category of beneficiaries. The Humanitarian Response Review had reaffirmed the inadequacy and unpredictability of IDP action and the General Assembly had called for more effective, accountable and predictable inter-agency response to internal displacement.

14. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee had proposed designating a lead agency to coordinate the efforts of all organizations active in a particular sector. Accordingly, UNICEF would take the lead function in the area of nutrition, water and sanitation and WHO in the area of health, while UNHCR would lead efforts to ensure IDP protection, camp coordination and management and shelter in situations of conflict-induced internal displacement. Logistics would be entrusted to the World Food Programme (WFP); the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNICEF and WFP would coordinate efforts in the area of telecommunications; and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) would be the lead agency for early recovery. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies had expressed interest in taking the lead role in ensuring shelter for persons displaced by natural disasters.

15. The lead agencies would be responsible for analysing the needs, priorities and gaps in services; coordinating all activities relevant to the sector; building national and local capacities; and providing direct assistance along with other partners. In that connection, mechanisms should be created to test performance with a view to ensuring quality service delivery.

16. UNHCR would remain committed to its refugee mandate and, at the same time, offer additional assistance to uncovered groups. Implementation was contingent on adequate funding for additional activities. The vision for 2006 was to improve humanitarian response capacities in all situations everywhere in the world. Support from donors and Member States was crucial to the effective implementation of the much-needed humanitarian reform.

17. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR and the humanitarian system as a whole must be predictable. UNHCR was part of the greater humanitarian community and was willing to take a leading role in designated areas, while being firmly committed to team spirit and recognizing the mandates and the autonomy of its non-United Nations partners.

18. The new approach should be applied to emerging crises and situations where the current arrangements had failed to produce satisfactory results. To implement the changes, existing capacities must be better utilized, instead of headquarters staff being increased, and the capacity of country teams must be further strengthened. The new activities would ideally be funded through existing, albeit reformed, mechanisms.

19. It was important for UNHCR to recognize the various advantages of the new approach, including increased effectiveness of its current intervention in displacement situations. Refugees and displaced persons often shared the same needs and vulnerabilities and addressing those

situations together would be advantageous. There was increasing recognition that in order to facilitate the safe and dignified return of refugees, efforts must focus on enhancing the capacities of their communities of origin, which often coincided with the places of return for IDPs. Instead of undermining UNHCR's refugee mandate, the new approach would facilitate linking refugee and IDP action more effectively, thus ensuring that the Office's expertise would benefit all persons in need of its support.

20. The CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Executive Committee to address the panellists.

21. Mr. STICKINGS (United Kingdom) expressed grave concern over the serious deficiencies in assistance provided to IDPs, in particular in Darfur. The inability to address internal displacement was perhaps the biggest failure in the humanitarian action of the international community. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, world leaders had committed themselves to taking effective measures to increase IDP protection; the plans for greater UNHCR involvement were commendable in that regard. Increased accountability and predictability were essential to improve the international community's response to IDP situations. The positive steps taken within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to clarify and assume the responsibility for protection, camp management and shelter in new IDP crises under the responsibility of UNHCR and the Emergency Relief Coordinator were also praiseworthy.

22. The primary responsibility for protecting and assisting IDPs rested with their Governments. Where States were unable to assume that responsibility, they must ensure rapid, secure and unimpeded access to international humanitarian organizations.

23. He commended the Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division of OCHA for its efforts to identify key gaps in the response and enhance the capacity of country teams. His delegation was hopeful that implementation of the new approach would start without undue delay.

24. Secure funding for UNHCR's new responsibilities was crucial. His Government had undertaken to make a substantial pledge to the Central Emergency Response Fund, should the General Assembly agree to the proposed reforms. However, UNHCR must not rely on the Fund as a single source of financing. Regular consultation with donors and Member States should be made a priority and his delegation looked forward to participating in that process.

25. UNHCR had acknowledged the shortcomings in its efforts to address situations of internal displacement and his delegation welcomed the Office's commitment to playing a greater role within the humanitarian community in responding to IDP crises. The new approach would, he hoped, ensure that displaced and vulnerable persons were no longer discriminated against on the grounds of not having crossed an international border.

26. Mr. ROUX (Belgium) welcomed the decision of UNHCR to take on a lead role in protection, camp management and emergency shelter for IDPs. He asked whether the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be among the countries where the new approach would be implemented as a matter of priority and how such action would be integrated in country operating plans to prevent duplication in the allocation of human and financial resources.

27. Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) welcomed the expressions of support by the representatives of the United Kingdom and Belgium. Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Sweden and Switzerland had pledged their commitment to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and other countries would soon follow suit, which augured well for the successful launch of the initiative following its approval by the General Assembly.

28. On the question of where pilot projects would be launched, one of the countries under consideration was the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for the reasons outlined by its representative. However, that would be decided at the inter-agency level at a meeting to be held on 12 December 2005. Once the new approach was endorsed by the various agencies concerned, work would commence on the division of labour for emergency operations in general, which it was hoped would be implemented as of January 2006.

29. He stressed the need for additional funding for refugees and internally displaced persons alike. It would be the ultimate irony to deprive one group of resources in order to give them to the other one. Pledges had been made by the Group of Eight (G-8) and European Union countries for an unprecedented increase in development assistance that was now needed for IDPs, and an effort would be made to reach out to non-traditional donors including the oil-producing countries that were considered as having a moral responsibility to become more involved.

30. Mr. GUTTERES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the ongoing dialogue with the Executive Committee would be continued through informal consultations and other means so as to ensure the predictability of UNHCR activities from the standpoint of the international community and their support by the Executive Committee. Additional funding was essential to increase UNHCR capacity in some countries so as to deal more effectively with the problems of refugees and IDPs alike.

31. Mr. ALMAGLY (Sudan) welcomed the presence of the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose personal commitment to peacemaking and the democratization of his country was well known. Sudan would shortly sign a tripartite agreement with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR on the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

32. He paid tribute to the High Commissioner, whose enthusiasm and devotion to the cause of refugees and IDPs had been borne out during his recent visit to Sudan. The country had faced the problem of displaced persons for some 40 years and had the highest number of IDPs in the world. The UNHCR initiative to ensure that the voluntary repatriation operations would benefit both refugees and IDPs was therefore highly commendable.

33. Praise was also due for the commitment and leadership skills of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, as demonstrated, inter alia, at a workshop on IDPs held recently at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in San Remo, Italy.

34. There were three causes of displacement in Sudan: development, disasters and conflicts. A collaborative approach by the international community would therefore be particularly beneficial for repatriation and demining operations. He welcomed cooperation to date with UNHCR and IOM. The crisis in Darfur was still under way and it was to be hoped that the

recent round of peace talks held in Abuja would provide lasting solutions. The main cause of displacement in Sudan had been conflict and until the conflict was settled the problems relating to IDPs could not be properly resolved.

35. Mr. ADLIDE (Australia) expressed appreciation of the commitment shown by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and other stakeholders to reinforcing the collaborative approach to IDPs. Australia endorsed the finding of the Humanitarian Response Review that the absence of accountability and leadership had hampered the effectiveness of the collaborative approach to date and therefore welcomed the proposal for sector leads and clusters. It also welcomed the UNHCR discussion paper on its role in those initiatives.

36. He urged UNHCR to give careful consideration to resources and staffing implications and welcomed the High Commissioner's assurance that there would be no impact on the UNHCR core refugee mandate. Being the cluster leader did not necessarily mean taking the operational lead in particular IDP situations and an emphasis on that aspect should be avoided. He looked forward to further discussion of the financial implications and cautioned against relying too heavily on the CERF as the principal source of funding.

37. With regard to training on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, he noted the Humanitarian Response Review finding that the collaborative approach had too often depended on the skills and authority of individual humanitarian coordinators. Given the lead role they played at the field level in responding to the requirements of IDPs, he stressed the importance of increased support to improve their capacity and authority. He welcomed the fact that the Norwegian Relief Council Global IDP Project had been invited to assume responsibility for training United Nations country teams on the Guiding Principles. Australia continued to provide financial support for the project, which it considered important. He would appreciate further information on the matter from the Emergency Relief Coordinator given that the Internal Displacement Division had identified training needs as critical.

38. In conclusion, he commended the commitment of UNHCR and other agencies, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, to strengthening the inter-agency collaborative response to IDPs. He encouraged stakeholders to continue discussion through a truly collaborative framework encompassing not only United Nations agencies and bodies, but also governments, donor NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

39. Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator), referring to the comments on training, said that often countries which most needed training did not request it. All country teams required training, and better tools for that purpose were now available. More training should be also dispensed to humanitarian coordinators and deputy humanitarian coordinators, before as well as after they took up their duties. He was grateful to Australia and other countries who were helping UNHCR to upgrade its capacity in that connection. It was not enough to mobilize funds and resources in the event of an emergency. One of the findings of the Humanitarian Response Review was that in some key areas the number of staff and specialists available had in fact fallen over the past few years.

40. Ms. FORERO UCROS (Colombia) said that the debate under way as part of the process of strengthening the inter-agency response to IDPs with a view to greater efficiency was indeed a very positive and timely development. A representative of the United Nations agencies had

visited Colombia earlier in the year to analyse the problems of IDPs and seek joint solutions. Meanwhile her Government was striving to ensure better coordination of efforts at the national level. She welcomed the proposal for UNHCR to play a leading role with regard to IDPs, specifically in the area of protection.

41. There were hundreds of thousands of displaced persons in Colombia, most of whom were IDPs, victims of indiscriminate violence by illegal armed groups. Although the number of IDPs had fallen in recent years, it was still high enough to be of great concern to the Government. It was important to draw a distinction between IDPs who were fleeing violence and others who were essentially economic migrants. That factor should be borne in mind for the purposes of compiling more accurate statistics.

42. In conclusion she expressed thanks for the discussion paper.

43. Mr. MBEMBA FUNDU (Democratic Republic of Congo) said that the problem of IDPs had not been given sufficient attention by the international community and that past action had not been properly coordinated. The situation where returnees had been provided with assistance and internally displaced persons had not given rise to considerable tension. The collaborative approach would certainly improve the overall efficiency of operations on the ground, provided that additional funding was forthcoming.

44. Mr. ALI (Uganda) expressed support for continued dialogue on streamlining inter-agency efforts to assist IDPs. The High Commissioner had attracted attention to their problems during his visit to Uganda at a time when considerable confusion reigned. His Government had endeavoured to rally support from the agencies concerned, but they had considered it was not their responsibility. He therefore welcomed the somewhat overdue initiative.

45. There were 1.4 million IDPs in Uganda, of whom 0.2 million were already settled. Uganda was also one of the few countries with policies on IDPs, which would facilitate implementation of the initiatives. He inquired how the process would be started and whether the request should come from the governments concerned or the Office.

46. The CHAIRMAN said that the statements thus far highlighted the importance Member States attached to the problem of IDPs, for which the international community must find a suitable response. In that connection the statement made by the representative of Uganda was particularly relevant.

47. Mr. EGELAND (Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator) welcomed the strong support for a more vigorous, predictable and morally correct response to the needs of IDPs, who had been neglected for too long. UNHCR assistance was needed and the experience it had gained in protection, shelter and camp management for refugees could be transferred to IDPs. OCHA through its Inter-Agency Internal Displacement Division would cooperate with UNHCR to ensure the successful launch of the initiative and the office's lead role in the cluster of United Nations and intergovernmental agencies and NGOs.

48. As for how the process would get under way, it would be useful for countries interested to indicate where improvements were required and for the humanitarian assistance partners to heed the requests of IDPs. At present emergencies were responded to at the request of country

teams. Uganda was one country where operations at the local, national and international levels had failed the internally displaced community; better solutions must be found and the new approach could well work there.

49. The fact of being a humanitarian agency should not be used as a pretext for lack of political action. The wounds could be covered but not healed without greater political involvement; there was no point in feeding people who would be massacred. Thus when embarking on humanitarian action one must be an advocate for political action too.

50. Mr. GUTTERES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the representative of Colombia for her expression of support. UNHCR cooperation with Colombia in the area of IDPs was not new and provided a good example of how solutions found for problems relating to refugees could be applied to IDPs.

51. It was clear that Uganda had had serious problems that the international community had failed to resolve. In contrast, the Ugandan Government and people had been extremely generous towards refugees and IDPs and the Government did not shirk its political duties. In order to ensure the protection of IDPs, it was important to have a clear strategy based on more effective security than was easily achieved in camp situations. The implementation of Government strategies would help the international community to play a more active role and assume its responsibilities. Given the great support shown by its Government in the past, Uganda was certainly a country where the new approach would pay dividends.

52. He expressed solidarity to the Democratic Republic of Congo, which was entering a new phase of democracy and political stability. Lastly, he was profoundly grateful to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for his exemplary cooperation over the past few months, and was counting on his leadership and clear vision to tackle future challenges.

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

53. Ms. JOINER (African Union) said the High Commissioner had demonstrated that African refugees were a UNHCR priority by going to Uganda on his first field visit. While the African Union was aware that grave violations of human rights in Africa had contributed to the increase in victims of forced displacement, its member States and peoples were more committed than ever to finding a solution to the root causes of displacement.

54. The African Union had been increasingly involved in preventing and responding to conflicts, ensuring that protection of the rights of African peoples remained its focus. Unconstitutional changes of government had been condemned and sanctions imposed on the offending regimes in the Central African Republic, Togo and Mauritania. In its attempt to encourage member States to uphold the highest standards of treatment for refugees, the African Union was campaigning to persuade the eight member States that had not yet ratified the 1969 OAU Convention governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa to do so. All member States had been urged on to ratify the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees at the recent summit of African leaders. The African Union called on the international community to continue its support of the many economically vulnerable countries that were hosting large numbers of refugees.

55. The African Mission in Sudan had been reinforced and would include some 7,000 troops by the end of 2005. While human rights abuses in western Sudan had continued, the locations where troops had been deployed were relatively calm. The African Union welcomed the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/1008) and the continued engagement of UNHCR in Darfur. While the ceasefire had held for the most part, the recent increase in clashes between conflicting parties had caused concern.

56. An increasing number of field assessment missions had been carried out, notably to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ghana and Benin. In some areas food rations and other forms of assistance had been drastically reduced in recent months as a result of so-called “compassion fatigue”, compelling many refugees to consider repatriation involuntarily.

57. The African Union Commission was currently developing a legal framework to protect IDPs, using the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. She invited United Nations agencies and other concerned international organizations and NGOs to avail themselves of that historic opportunity to codify legislation in favour of IDPs.

58. In developing an African policy on migration, the African Union recognized the need to address the root causes as well as the end result of migration. Asylum should always be accessible to those fleeing persecution, and measures to combat trafficking in persons should not be used to deny asylum-seekers and refugees access to international protection. A recent decision of the Executive Council of the African Union had called for the establishment of a free movement regime in Africa, which would be underpinned by: the easing of residence permit requirements; the easing and eventual waiver of visa regimes; the establishment of an African passport; and the development of a framework to govern mass expulsions. Given that a number of regional and bilateral free movement regimes already existed, a continent-wide agreement should be attainable in the medium to long term.

59. Through the revitalization of the Coordinating Committee on Assistance and Protection to Refugees and IDPs, the African Union had secured the involvement of key international partners in its activities. The Committee’s current goal was to increase the participation of African humanitarian institutions and other bodies working in the area of forced displacement.

60. While the African Union welcomed UNHCR optimism about a year of return, it had witnessed declining international support for voluntary repatriation and the reintegration of refugees and formerly displaced persons. Despite the euphoria at the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement for southern Sudan and at the subsequent donors’ conference in Oslo, there had not yet been any significant disbursement of those funds to Sudan. A further complication had been the shifting demands of the international community on Somalia, where despite the Government’s relocation no significant assistance had yet been received.

61. The global reduction in the number of people seeking asylum in 38 industrialized countries had been a result of increasingly stringent asylum regulations. The system of international protection would be stronger and more credible if there were frank discussions about the full and effective implementation of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as outlined in the UNHCR Agenda for Protection. While supporting the

proposed creation of the position of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, the African Union also called for adequate resources for programme implementation, which would be difficult in view of the UNHCR budget deficit.

62. She invited UNHCR and other partners to participate fully in the forthcoming African Union Ministerial Conference in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It would be an opportunity to assess progress in seeking solutions to forced displacement in Africa, and would provide a regional platform to address some of the issues emerging from the Convention Plus process.

63. Mr. BROWN (Canada) said that while refugee numbers had fallen significantly, there were greater numbers of IDPs, whose need for international assistance was no less. While Canada commended the good will of many countries that continued to offer asylum, some refugees were still turned back at international borders. In many countries, the general public no longer distinguished between refugee protection and the more general concerns caused by increased immigration. While the international community was increasingly sensitive to the needs of people affected by crises, its action often did not provide equitable, lasting solutions for peace and the definitive return of refugees, or physical security for refugees and humanitarian workers.

64. UNHCR should prioritize its protection and emergency response capacities. Investment in staff, particularly their security, should be increased. Efforts should be made to ensure that people with the right expertise were located in the right places, even if that led to a reduced UNHCR presence in some developed countries. Programming should be sensitive to gender, age and diversity, and all staff should be attentive to the risks to refugees' physical safety, including sexual abuse and exploitation. Canada welcomed the High Commissioner's intention to improve integration of the protection and operational functions, and his proposed review of the results of management changes in 2007.

65. His delegation supported the High Commissioner's emphasis on strengthening UNHCR's policy capacity, particularly its evaluation function. Management should be oriented towards concrete, measurable results, accountability and transparency to ensure all operations were effective. UNHCR should promote a culture of learning.

66. The Office should continue to play an integral role in the broader United Nations humanitarian system and coordination structure. Canada welcomed the pursuit by the Emergency Relief Coordinator of the Humanitarian Response Review, which complemented State-led efforts such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. Establishing cluster coordination leads would provide an opportunity to foster greater collaboration, predictability and accountability in multilateral responses to populations affected by crisis, including IDPs. While UNHCR had key expertise and should play its part, the Executive Committee should continue to act as a supervisory mechanism to ensure that financial and policy implications were carefully reviewed to mitigate any impact on its refugee protection mandate.

67. Mr. PRACHONPACHANUK (Thailand) expressed his delegation's condolences to the Republic of Indonesia and the relatives of the victims of the recent bomb attacks in Bali, and condemned those inhumane acts.

68. His delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's intention that UNHCR should play an active role in the Peace building Commission, and be involved in the United Nations reform process in a constructive and forward-looking manner. Finding durable solutions had been a high priority for Thailand, and it had been involved in the Convention Plus consultations from the outset. It remained confident that a more systematic, practical and targeted approach to protracted situations would prove useful. Human security and durable solutions were mutually reinforcing; as the current chair of the Human Security Network, Thailand had proposed many initiatives that should contribute to creating an environment conducive to lasting solutions.

69. Enhanced cooperation between UNHCR and other development agencies and regional organizations should include strategies to strengthen the capacity of countries of origin to address the root causes of migration. It should also ensure that work on the migration-asylum nexus should be effectively implemented in accordance with the mandates of the respective partners.

70. He thanked UNHCR for the assistance Thailand had received in the wake of the tsunami disaster in December 2004. The expertise of UNHCR in designing and implementing contingency plans could provide a blueprint for action as an emergency management response framework.

71. UNHCR support in the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Consultations on Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants was greatly appreciated. It was important to promote understanding and reinforce practical and technical cooperation between countries in the region to ensure that asylum was not used as a tool for political exploitation. In cooperation with UNHCR, the Thai Government was about to complete the resettlement of 15,000 people from the Hmong community to the United States of America. Thailand's Provincial Admission Board, the mechanism for determining national status, would resume its operations in the last quarter of 2005.

72. The Thai Government was to hold a celebration in November 2005 to commemorate 30 years of cooperation with UNHCR. It would examine the presence of the Office in Thailand, from the first influx of Indo-Chinese refugees to the current time. It would be an opportunity to reflect on the need for cooperation with host countries, and the benefits of a consultative approach.

73. Mr. GNESA (Switzerland) said that under its amended legislation, Switzerland would grant refugee status to victims of non-State persecution, enabling them to obtain permanent right of abode.

74. Switzerland supported all measures to strengthen the protection mandate of UNHCR, including the creation of the position of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. That development should be integrated into a management restructuring process that took into account the conclusions of the Humanitarian Response Review, and should be evaluated after two years. Action plans should be implemented in the field to prevent sexual and gender-based violence against women refugees and all abuse of child refugees. Given the current increase in cases of HIV/AIDS, women and child refugees should remain a priority concern for UNHCR under its protection mandate.

75. While primary responsibility for assisting and protecting IDPs lay with States, Switzerland supported a more systematic commitment by UNHCR to helping that category of person, on the understanding that it would not undermine its efforts to protect refugees. His delegation joined others in inviting the High Commissioner to inform Member States of the organizational and financial implications of that commitment. Resource allocation for IDPs should be transparent, and their protection needs should be determined using UNHCR expertise in joint needs assessment.

76. Switzerland supported the High Commissioner's proposal to mainstream and operationalize the work done in the context of Convention Plus. While the goal of concluding a framework agreement on irregular secondary movements had proved over-ambitious, that approach had facilitated a constructive debate on the issue. Efforts should now be focused on implementing measures to strengthen protection capacity on the ground.

77. Mr. LUNDE (Norway) welcomed efforts to define the collaborative response mechanism for meeting the needs of IDPs, and to share responsibility for their care between different United Nations agencies. That should ensure more timely protection for IDPs and better accountability, as recommended in the Humanitarian Response Review. While it was appropriate that the invaluable experience of UNHCR in the areas of protection, emergency shelter and camp management should assist IDPs, additional funding and resources would be required if UNHCR was to continue honouring its existing responsibilities. In that context, the CERF, to which Norway had pledged Nkr 100 million, would be important for all those involved in the initial phase of urgent operations. Work should continue on strengthening the role of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

78. While the number of people needing UNHCR's protection had continued to fall, the number of protracted refugee situations had not decreased. Norway urged the High Commissioner to continue efforts to mobilize a broad international partnership to meet refugees' urgent needs for protection and assistance and to find durable solutions, particularly for refugees who had been in exile for a long time. Efforts to improve the situation of refugees in partnership with host Governments should be based on the principle of burden sharing.

79. Noting the decision to dismantle the Convention Plus unit and to mainstream its activities throughout UNHCR, Norway welcomed the High Commissioner's confirmation of the value of that initiative. It would be useful to receive reports in future on the progress made in strengthening its focus through mainstreaming.

80. There was scope for further implementation in UNHCR strategy, planning and daily work of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. In the context of refugees and IDPs, the resolution called not only for the protection of women and girls, but also for women's active participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. Only equal representation at all levels of decision-making would ensure that women's needs were truly met. UNHCR should report on the measures it had taken to ensure it acted in accordance with the United Nations zero tolerance policy on sexual violence and abuse committed by United Nations personnel. Openings should be made for external recruitment into UNHCR in order to meet the objective of full gender equality at all levels and to recruit senior staff with sufficient field experience.

81. Mr. FAIDUTTI ESTRADA (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), said that the participation of the Secretary-General in the current session of the Executive Committee demonstrated the confidence placed in the work of UNHCR. The number of refugees present in GRULAC countries had increased considerably since 2002, and continued to grow. Measures had been taken to respond to the complex humanitarian situation in the region, such as the adoption of the Mexico Plan of Action in 2004. The effective implementation of the Plan of Action required significant international support, in order to ensure that efforts were translated into practical results. The adoption of the Plan had been a particularly important step in the development of international refugee law, since it defined clear lines of action and set out priorities for protection and lasting solutions in Latin America. It was the first such plan that had been developed with cooperation between Latin American governments, international organizations and civil society, and it underscored the importance of international cooperation, solidarity, and burden sharing. A parallel event would be held in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee during the current session, in order to evaluate the progress made since the adoption of the Plan of Action.

82. The formidable challenges facing Latin American countries required international recognition and support, including direct funding for viable projects, in order to address the situation of millions of displaced persons in the region. Latin America was against the establishment of refugee camps, and preferred to implement a policy of local integration. The governments of the region welcomed the support and openness demonstrated by UNHCR, and would continue to support the Office's activities.

83. Mr. HUGHES (Australia) welcomed the decline recorded over the past year in the number of refugees worldwide, as a result of ongoing efforts by UNHCR and States. Most of that success had resulted from voluntary repatriation alongside resettlement and local integration. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNHCR had also been successful in developing new solutions to some long-standing caseloads. There had, however, been some serious setbacks with the continuation of physical insecurity, and ongoing human rights violations in areas such as Darfur.

84. With a new High Commissioner and a new organizational structure the time was right to reassess UNHCR's priorities for the future, and to build on its previous successes. The first priority should be to ensure that the basic physical and food security needs of refugees were met while long-term solutions were being found. The provision of physical and food security could be very difficult, but those challenges must be overcome. Australia was committed to the provision of food security and therefore had contributed 40 million Australian dollars to emergency assistance since May 2004, 14 million of which had been allocated to the World Food Programme for emergency food aid to refugees in Chad and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur.

85. The second priority should be to focus on practical, durable solutions for refugees, and particularly on finding ways to resolve the protracted situations that affected over 6 million of the world's 9.2 million refugees. Refugees must not continue to be trapped in camps for many years, unable to rebuild their lives quickly even when solutions were found. The system of international protection must be dynamic and capable of incorporating new ideas. UNHCR and States must endeavour to develop "best practice" solutions on the basis of situations that had been resolved in recent years.

86. Thirdly, Australia called on UNHCR to ensure the effective and strategic use of resettlement as part of a comprehensive approach to providing lasting solutions. Though it might not be best in all situations, could resettlement be appropriate for those with limited prospects of repatriation or local integration, be a safe and dignified alternative to irregular movement for refugees, and help alleviate some of the pressures on host countries? It could thus play an important part in the resolution of protracted caseloads. Australia would therefore continue its longstanding resettlement contribution and had high hopes that the proposed organizational changes in UNHCR would help to achieve a more effective infrastructure to support resettlement. Efforts must be made to ensure that all existing resettlement places were effectively used and that UNHCR was able to support new countries that were making resettlement places available.

87. Fourthly, UNHCR must work closely with States and other partners in the collaborative approach to addressing the situation of IDPs. Each of the many humanitarian agencies working with IDPs must focus on its comparative advantages, working to coordinate all efforts and develop partnerships with other interested parties. UNHCR would not always have the comparative advantage and must be careful not to divert resources from its core function of protecting refugees. Australia welcomed the sensible approach being taken by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its member organizations to strengthening the collaborative response to IDP situations.

88. Fifthly, UNHCR must ensure that its organizational structures and budgetary processes maximized the delivery of assistance to refugees. It should address the need for strong audit and financial controls while not burdening itself with unnecessary and inefficient rules and procedures. It should be efficient in raising funds from donors, and applying them quickly and effectively to projects and activities that would help those in greatest need.

89. Mr. HILALE (Morocco) said that international protection continued to be the cornerstone of the UNHCR mandate, as had recently been reaffirmed at the United Nations Summit in New York. Morocco considered that the establishment of a post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection had become essential, since it would clearly demonstrate the Office's determination to provide better protection for refugees across the world and would facilitate, among other things, the implementation of the Agenda for Protection on the ground.

90. Morocco was in favour of a substantial increase in the UNHCR budget, in the context of the general budget of the United Nations, and also supported the initiative to enlarge and diversify the pool of private donors, the funds from which would be used solely at the Office's discretion. Further, his delegation wished to propose the establishment of an ad hoc fund reserved for the promotion and implementation of durable solutions, the management of which would be solely the responsibility of the High Commissioner. Such a fund would require a mechanism within the Executive Committee mandated to determine the practical modalities of its use, and inform the members of the Committee of measures taken.

91. The strategic and operational strengthening of the Office's partnership with other United Nations agencies and NGOs deserved support. He also welcomed the High Commissioner's commitment to fostering a culture of transparency and responsibility in the work of his Office, particularly by publishing the results of its inspections and investigations and monitoring the follow-up given to its conclusions and recommendations.

92. The situation of the populations of the camps in Tindouf required the Committee's attention more than ever before. They were the only "refugees" in the world who had been deprived of the right to freedom of movement, were not allowed to leave the camps, and were denied voluntary repatriation. The completion of the registration process for millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan highlighted the seriousness of the situation for those in the Tindouf camps, who could not be registered, since Algeria, the country of asylum, made it conditional upon the political resolution of the dispute in Western Sahara. Morocco rejected the conditions imposed by Algeria, which were both immoral and illegal. Registration was a statutory responsibility of UNHCR. Algeria was therefore not only impeding the work of UNHCR, but also committing a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

93. Although Algeria had stated in several international forums, including the General Assembly and the Security Council, that the resolution of the dispute over Western Sahara was a matter for the United Nations and that it was neutral on the matter, it was doing everything in its power to obstruct a settlement. Morocco called on UNHCR and WFP to publish and ensure the implementation of the conclusions and recommendations of the report on their inquiry into the situation in the Tindouf camps. In other parts of the world, refugees were registered and repatriated in their countries of origin, independently of any political processes. Morocco welcomed the fact that international humanitarian law prevailed in such circumstances, and hoped that would soon be the case in Tindouf.

94. Regarding the UNHCR document on the registration of camp populations, which stated that 90,000 vulnerable persons were receiving UNHCR assistance, that figure appeared to be simply a repetition of an estimate contained in the High Commissioner's report to the United Nations General Assembly of 1997 (E/1997/17). Furthermore, it was not based on any internationally recognized standard, and did not allow the donor community to know precisely who had received assistance. The Government of Morocco believed that the population of the Tindouf camps was considerably less than 90,000. However, it was satisfied with the commitment of UNHCR to continuing its efforts, in order to enable the population of the camps to be registered in conformity with UNHCR standards.

95. Welcoming the efforts made by the Office to implement measures of confidence, he said that Morocco had recently agreed to allow visits between those living in the Tindouf camps and their close relatives in Morocco to be resumed. Morocco was committed to relieving the suffering of its citizens, and to disassociating political and humanitarian activity.

96. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that his Government was particularly committed to improving the situation of displaced populations in areas such as employment, housing, health and education. Experience had shown that transition from humanitarian to development assistance in situations of protracted displacement was particularly difficult and required significant resources. He therefore wished to emphasize the importance of goal 3 of the Agenda for Protection, concerning the need for burden and responsibility sharing, particularly for countries in transition and developing countries that hosted large numbers of displaced persons for long periods of time.

97. Although his Government believed that voluntary repatriation was the most effective, lasting solution for the remaining displaced population in the region of the former Republic of Yugoslavia, it recognized that resettlement and local integration were also essential components

of solutions to protracted refugee situations. He therefore emphasized the importance of full respect for tenancy and property rights, without any discrimination, which would provide refugees with much needed resources. He hoped that the implementation of the Sarajevo Declaration would help to overcome the problems that still existed in that regard. The establishment of a task force to draw up and implement roadmaps, including clearly defined deadlines and requirements for effectively addressing displacement in the region, had been an important move.

98. His delegation was particularly concerned at the practice of forcibly returning refugees to the province of Kosovo and Metohija, on the basis of the readmission agreements that some countries had concluded with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and without respect for the principle of non-refoulement. His Government appreciated the efforts of UNHCR to oppose the forcible return of minority populations originating from Kosovo and Metohija to situations where they would be deprived of their basic human rights.

99. He thanked UNHCR for its continuous assistance to Serbia and Montenegro in developing an adequate asylum system. New asylum legislation had been adopted, and by-laws were currently being drafted. His Government was committed to collaborating with UNHCR, IOM and other interested actors to streamline asylum structures and refugee status determination procedures.

100. The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro provided shelter for the largest refugee and IDP population in Europe. Though the number of refugees on its territory had decreased significantly, there were still 350,000 who required further assistance for local integration. Between 1999 and 2005, the number of IDPs from Kosovo and Metohija had increased considerably, and very few had returned to the province. The situation was particularly worrying, since the displacement of communities from the province was continuing, despite a six-year international presence in Kosovo and Metohija. His delegation therefore supported the High Commissioner's commitment to dealing with the issue of IDPs in a more targeted manner. It also welcomed the humanitarian reform initiatives for strengthening inter-agency collaborative responses to IDP situations.

101. In order to begin the implementation of its national strategy for resolving the issue of refugees and IDPs, the Government of Montenegro had organized in July 2005 a donor conference to which it had presented several projects requiring support. The Commissariat for Displaced Persons of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro had signed a protocol of cooperation with UNMIK to ensure the safe and unimpeded return of IDPs. The Government intended to improve the prospects for the sustainable return of displaced persons, by complementing and strengthening the activities of various actors, including UNHCR, already under way in the Republic.

102. In 2002 the Serbian Government had adopted a national strategy for resolving the issue of refugees and IDPs, which aimed at creating the necessary conditions for the voluntary repatriation and local integration of displaced populations. The number of refugees in the Republic had decreased significantly, particularly as a result of their decision to acquire Serbian citizenship, as a first step towards local integration. Amendments to asylum legislation were currently being drafted, which aimed to create suitable conditions for local integration, particularly with regard to housing and property issues. There were 20,000 IDPs in the province

of Kosovo and Metohija. Since they were citizens of the Republic of Serbia, they enjoyed equal rights with all other Serbian citizens. The most vulnerable IDPs were accommodated in collective centres, 95 per cent of the funding for which was provided by the Serbian Government.

103. Serbia and Montenegro was making considerable efforts to provide assistance to refugees and IDPs in situations of protracted displacement, and was committed to collaborating with the international community to achieve lasting solutions. In order for the displaced population to return to Kosovo and Metohija, the necessary preconditions and guarantees for a sustainable return must be created. Further resources were required to ensure the effective local integration of refugees and IDPs in the State Union, and for that the Government relied on the assistance of the international community.

104. Mr. ROUX (Belgium) said that Belgium paid particular attention to the Great Lakes Region in Africa, and allocated a considerable part of its funding to that area. Despite considerable progress, the region continued to require sustained political attention and significant budgetary resources, so it was essential that a substantial portion of UNHCR's programme budget should be allocated to that region. As elsewhere, voluntary repatriation should remain the preferred solution to the situation. Political progress in Burundi over the past year had allowed accelerated return of refugees, which would continue during the coming months. UNHCR must continue to play a central role in accompanying returning refugees, and assisting their reintegration in their country of origin. The scale and complexity of repatriation operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo continued to be a challenge for UNHCR, and required the support of the international community. It would be regrettable if the integration of UNHCR operations in Burundi into the programme budget as from 2006 were to result in a reduction of available resources.

105. Belgium called on UNHCR to continue to promote the case of refugees in development forums, and to encourage the inclusion of reintegration in the planning of transition and reconstruction activities. He considered it particularly important that the reintegration of refugees in their countries of origin should be included in the poverty reduction strategy papers of the countries concerned. He welcomed UNHCR efforts over the past year to respond to challenges in respect of international protection for refugees in emergency situations, and to find durable solutions for them. Belgium was in favour of all measures that could contribute to the practical implementation of the protection aspect of the UNHCR mandate, and supported the proposal for the establishment of the post of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. The ultimate aim of the establishment of that post must be to make protection an operational aspect of all activities for refugees.

106. His delegation welcomed the progress made in granting increased protection to women, children and the elderly, and the efforts made to include provisions for those categories in all UNHCR activities. He stressed the importance of education, of all levels, for refugees and particularly for young refugees. Belgium welcomed the progress made during the recent United Nations Summit in New York with respect to the protection of displaced persons, in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

107. Belgium was in favour of the inter-agency approach to the humanitarian response to situations of internal displacement. Although the three sectors in which increased responsibility for IDPs would fall on UNHCR were certainly in the Office's remit, care must be taken to ensure that the joint approach to IDP situations remained prevalent, and that such additional responsibilities were not detrimental to refugees, who must remain the Office's principal concern. The tasks facing UNHCR were becoming increasingly complex, and Belgium believed that the key to improving the humanitarian response to those challenges lay in closer coordination between all agencies and partners. His delegation welcomed the Office's efforts to promote transparent and efficient management, and urged the further examination and rationalization of working methods. The recommendations of the Marnet report should be implemented as quickly as possible.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.