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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 600TH MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 2 October 2006, at 3 P.M.

Chairman: Mr FUJISAKI (Japan)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. ENDO (Japan) said that his country supported without reservation the reforms undertaken by the High Commissioner for Refugees, and hoped that they would allow the Office of the High Commissioner to boost its field effectiveness to the maximum. It was important above all to strike a fair balance between staff and administrative expenditures, on one hand, and operations spending on the other hand, to broaden the donor base, to prepare a human resource management strategy that was more flexible and efficient, to improve the allocation of resources, and to strengthen collaboration with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). UNHCR should pursue consultations with members of the Executive Committee and its own staff on this matter.

2. Japan commended the diligence with which UNHCR had responded to the emergency situations in East Timor and in Lebanon in 2006. The alarming situation in Chad and in Sudan, on the other hand, demanded attention from the international community. In 2006, Japan had contributed more than US\$10 million to finance UNHCR activities in those countries. The Japanese government welcomed the steps taken by UNHCR to bolster its emergency response capacity, particularly with the creation of the Emergency Training Center ("eCenter"). While protection was still the core of its mandate, UNHCR must not lose sight of the importance of durable solutions. On this point, the empowerment of vulnerable people took on greater importance, for it was by becoming self-supporting that these people would be able, in turn, to help other individuals.

3. Mr. KONCELLAH (Kenya) agreed with the statement by Algeria on behalf of the African group. He announced that Kenya had undertaken to reinforce the capacities of its secretariat for refugees so that it could carry out the functions previously entrusted to UNHCR, in particular registration, refugee status determination, and delivery of identity papers. In this way, the Office of the High Commissioner could devote itself more thoroughly to the search for durable solutions. Kenya thanked the Danish government for its grant of 19.7 million kroner to help strengthen the capacities of the secretariat for refugees.

4. The international community must continue to provide predictable aid to refugees, and also to those countries that were hosts to long-term refugees. After signing tripartite agreements, the international community had frequently reduced its financial assistance to host countries, while those agreements did not necessarily entail the immediate return of refugees to their own countries. Like other countries, Kenya found itself in a situation where more refugees were arriving than departing. Since the signature of the tripartite agreement in early 2006, 1200 Sudanese refugees had returned home, while 7000 Sudanese had sought refuge in Kenya.

5. Apart from the 240,000 refugees living in the camps of Dadaab and Kakuma, and the 60,000 refugees housed in its major cities, Kenya had to cope with the arrival of 300 refugees daily, on average, from Somalia. A total of 25,000 people had come from Somalia over the last nine months. The Kenyan authorities had played a key role in the

search for peace in Sudan and in Somalia, but while the situation seemed to have stabilized in Sudan it remained explosive in Somalia. Kenya needed financial and material support to continue to offer protection for Somalian refugees.

6. Because the refugee camps were located in ecologically fragile regions, Kenya was constantly seeking financial support to implement environmental protection programmes. Moreover, environmental degradation had become a source of tension between local people and the refugees, who were seen as more favoured by international assistance. To remedy this situation, local communities needed assistance in the form, for example, of micro-finance programmes. On this point, Kenya thanked Denmark, the United States, Germany and other countries for their aid, as well as the World Food Programme, which had worked with the Kenyan government to supply food, water and other services to communities affected by drought at the beginning of 2006.

7. Mr. HUGHES (Australia) noted with satisfaction that the total number of refugees had continued to drop in 2005, thanks in large part to voluntary repatriation programmes in Afghanistan, in Iraq and in several African countries. In the Asia and Pacific region, UNHCR had found solutions to resolve the situation of certain long-term refugees. Despite these encouraging developments, massive displacements of refugees continued to be of concern. According to the High Commissioner, long-term refugees were more numerous than in the wake of the Cold War, and they were spending more time in exile. In some regions of the world, in particular in Chad and in Darfur, displaced persons were not always protected. Further internal displacements had occurred in Lebanon and in East Timor. In this context, UNHCR and the international community must find ways to help reduce the number of refugees while addressing situations of displacement.

8. During this period of reform, UNHCR should establish very clear priorities. First, it should look for durable and practical solutions. It should not tolerate a situation in which, year after year, millions of people were trapped in the camps, without any hope of rebuilding their lives. Australia intended to cooperate with UNHCR and with States to settle the situation of certain refugees in long-term exile in the Asia-Pacific region, and to increase the number of places available for resettlement. Collaboration between UNHCR and the Government of Thailand had succeeded in registering some 102,000 refugees, and resettling around 13,000.

9. The Office should continue to offer physical protection in the refugee camps, in particular for women and children, while awaiting long-term solutions. Recognizing that women and girls were particularly vulnerable in the camps, Australia had devoted a special programme to them since 1989, as part of its resettlement plan. Thus, more than 7000 women and their children had been resettled since the beginning of the programme, and at least 10.5% of places provided in the humanitarian programme were reserved for female refugees.

10. The resettlement of refugees was another area in which UNHCR could take advantage of its partners, with the goal of ensuring that all available places were used for resettlement and that the new countries offering places would receive assistance.

Australia was giving its full support to the programme to reform the Office, and welcomed the efforts made to devote greater resources to those areas where refugee needs were greatest. It also welcomed the creation of a regional protection centre at Kuala Lumpur.

11. Mr. van FENENNAAM (Netherlands) supported the UNHCR reform programme as necessary for building a more efficient and financially more stable organization. He announced that his country would make a supplementary contribution of €500,000 to support the reform. While the Netherlands was pleased, he said, that the Office intended to pay as much attention to displaced persons as to refugees in order to take better account of realities in the field, he stressed that refugee protection must remain at the core of the organization's mandate. Further, unofficial consultations should be organized on this change of policy thrust and its budgetary implications. The Netherlands urged all donors, old and new, to share the burden.

12. The Netherlands considered that refugees should be protected as close as possible to their region of origin, and to this end it was participating in the implementation of regional protection programmes in the European Union. In this connection, the Netherlands welcomed the launch of a pilot programme with UNHCR and the United Republic of Tanzania on 1 January 2007. Mixed migratory movements deserved special attention. In those cases, refugees needed access to protection and asylum, which required a swift identification procedure for those who needed protection, and the return of those who did not need it, so as to preserve the integrity of the protection and asylum systems. UNHCR's 10-point Plan of Action to address mixed migratory movements provided very useful guidance and was of great interest for the Mediterranean basin. The Netherlands would continue to support UNHCR efforts to strengthen the protection regime in this region. It welcomed UNHCR's determination to prevent HIV/AIDS and sexual violence against refugee women and girls, but it urged the organization to pay greater attention to the situation of women and girls in all its policies.

13. The humanitarian situation was extremely worrisome in Darfur, where millions of people were in danger. Humanitarian workers were being killed, and humanitarian convoys were the target of repeated attacks. The Netherlands called on all parties to the conflict to eschew resort to arms, to work for a real cease-fire, and to let humanitarian agencies do their work. It commended the actions of UNHCR to help displaced persons and refugees in Darfur and in Chad. With reference to the situation in Nepal, which had been host to more than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan for more than 10 years, the Netherlands welcomed the recent cooperation of the Nepalese government for resolving the situation and it urged the Government of Bhutan to do the same. The Netherlands was fully prepared to help find an overall solution to the problem.

14. Mr. BROWN (Canada) welcomed the High Commissioner's determination to give new impetus to UNHCR so that it could effectively fulfil its mandate of protecting refugees while taking on new tasks of coordination on behalf of displaced persons. UNHCR and the Executive Committee should take action on three broad fronts: finding durable solutions for the 8.4 million refugees in the world, most of whom had been in

exile for at least 10 years; further strengthening the global system for responding to humanitarian crises; and allowing UNHCR to address these new challenges in a predictable and effective manner. UNHCR should build upon the body of conclusions relating to durable solutions that the Executive Committee had prepared and should present a plan of action in 2007 that would give priority to long-term refugees, and would specify how member States and other partners could assist in this regard.

15. Canada considered that UNHCR, fresh from its recent field experience, should explain how it intended to assume its new coordination responsibilities for managing the camps and meeting the housing and protection needs of displaced persons. It should specify how it intended to play its new role, while retaining its basic mandate, which was to protect refugees. Canada welcomed the determination of the new Deputy High Commissioner for Protection to reduce the internal barriers within UNHCR so that all units could devote themselves to comprehensive legal, physical and social protection. It was pleased at the importance which the new Deputy High Commissioner for Operations was attaching to collaboration with other UN partners and to UNHCR's strategies for withdrawal once its mission was accomplished.

16. Canada also commended the priority given by the High Commissioner to modernizing management and administration, including the reallocation of staff in line with the organization's new needs. UNHCR should pay even greater attention to results-based management and should acquire solid means of assessment in order to strengthen its accountability and maximize its effectiveness in the humanitarian field. UNHCR must adapt itself to a new role and to new responsibilities, while continuing to fulfil its protection mandate. This adaptation would have to rely on modern management practices that focussed on results and on accountability, not only to States but to the people it served. To achieve this goal, management and the Executive Committee would need to show solid determination. Canada intended to cooperate closely with UNHCR and its partners in the Executive Committee to give a new direction to the Office of the High Commissioner in the coming year.

17. Mr. HOERLBERGER (Austria) subscribed to the European Union declaration and said that the protection of refugees remained at the heart of UNHCR mandate. While the total number of refugees has dropped in recent years, much remained to be done to preserve the international refugee protection system. The 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol were the cornerstones of that system and the principle of non-refoulement must be respected by all States in all circumstances. Austria welcomed creation of the post of Deputy High Commissioner for Protection in early 2006, and it urged UNHCR to continue to incorporate refugee protection into all its field operations. It was also pleased at UNHCR's determination to play a leading role in protecting displaced persons, within the inter-agency framework. It urged the organization to work closely with host countries and donor countries, other agencies, NGOs, and the Secretary-General's Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, Mr. Walter Kälin. According to him, effective application of the guiding principles on internal displacement was essential for improving the situation of displaced persons. Austria welcomed the Representative's recommendations to this effect, and in particular his proposed manual

for legislators. Austria had recently hosted a meeting of experts on ways of reinforcing application of the guiding principles at the national level. Finally, it noted with satisfaction that the Representative of the Secretary-General and UNHCR had concluded a memorandum of understanding specifying the links between their two mandates.

18. Austria considered that questions relating to development, migrations, refugee protection and the defence of human rights should be addressed comprehensively. It had participated in the high-level dialogue on international migrations and development, held in New York in September. That dialogue provided UNHCR with an opportunity to highlight its unique capacities in refugee protection and to reaffirm that the management of migratory flows must be an integral part of international efforts for development. Austria urged the High Commissioner to participate in follow-up to the high-level dialogue and to play an active role in the Global Migration Group.

19. Mr. BAKAYOKO (Côte d'Ivoire) recalled that his country had been immersed for four years in a severe political and military crisis and that the case of the Côte d'Ivoire provided a good illustration of the adverse impact that conflicts could have on human security. Côte d'Ivoire, which currently found itself in a critical humanitarian situation, had 2 million internally displaced persons. Most of these were being sheltered by families that lacked the means to meet their needs. Given this situation, the Ivorian government was appealing to the international community and UNHCR, in particular, to take in hand the humanitarian needs of these people.

20. The Ivorian government was eager to find a long-term solution to the problem of internally displaced persons, and planned to introduce, with the help of UNHCR, an interministerial coordination mechanism for protecting and assisting these people. This mechanism would stress the three fundamental principles: return in safety and dignity, recovery of property, and access to fundamental rights and basic social services.

21. Mr. KOLOMA (Mozambique) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement given by the Representative of Algeria on behalf of the African group. He indicated that Mozambique was currently host to 6,640 refugees and asylum-seekers, most of them from the Great Lakes region. His government had undertaken to strengthen its legislation by preparing a draft law on the status of refugees, which should be adopted by the end of 2006. It placed particular attention on the situation of refugees living in the Maratané Camp, which alone was holding 4,775 people. Many of these refugees were youngsters of secondary school age, and ways were being examined to allow them to receive instruction, as a means of promoting their subsequent integration. A further important problem facing the Mozambique authorities lay in the fact that people were abusing their refugee status in Mozambique to engage in drug trafficking and other criminal activities in southern Africa.

22. The appointment of a resident representative of UNHCR in Maputo had greatly facilitated decision-making on all refugee issues in the country. For this reason, the Mozambique delegation was urging UNHCR to maintain its office in Maputo, as it regionalized activities in southern Africa. The government was extremely concerned by

the financial situation of UNHCR. The cutback in funds allocated to UNHCR operations in Mozambique had had adverse repercussions on assistance to refugees, including the more vulnerable groups such as women and children. A broadening of UNHCR's financial base would allow it better to address unanticipated needs resulting from emergency situations, and to reinforce the protection of refugees. The elimination of violence against children remained a priority for the Mozambique government, which fully supported the High Commissioner's initiatives on behalf of refugee children.

23. Mr. JOHANSEN (Norway) stressed the need to improve the functioning of UNHCR, to respond more effectively to changing needs. Noting that general costs and staff expenses had risen steadily in recent years, he worried that this trend would have a negative impact on UNHCR's capacity to take effective action on behalf of the direct beneficiaries of these programmes. To maintain the support of its donors, UNHCR would have to demonstrate its efficiency by increasing the share of funds allocated to operations. The Norwegian delegation was encouraged by the reform process undertaken within UNHCR, but it felt compelled to point out that much remained to be done and that some difficult decisions must be taken, and in this regard it recommended thorough consultations to avoid demoralizing staff, while continuing along the path to change.

24. The Norwegian government welcomed the High Commissioner's commitment to internally displaced persons. Donor contributions to the supplementary programme created for these persons demonstrated that this new thrust had been favourably received. Nevertheless, the modular approach implemented in this field needed further clarification. The notion of "lead agency", in particular, was not always well understood. If this new approach was to result in a true partnership between UN agencies and NGOs, the latter would have to be associated at all stages, from strategy preparation through to practical implementation. The crucial protection role of NGOs needed to be fully recognized and exploited. The importance that UNHCR now attached to protecting displaced persons should also be better reflected in the annual budget. On this point, the Norwegian government would be in favour of having the budget include programmes specifically dedicated to displaced persons. The draft budget presented to the Executive Committee for approval contained some significant improvements, relating in particular to the introduction of results-based management.

25. The Norwegian delegation, while welcoming the conclusions presented to the Executive Committee on the situation of vulnerable women and girls, hoped that the many observations and recommendations contained in those conclusions would be rigorously followed up. The Norwegian government agreed with the special importance attached to this question, and on 8 March last it launched a national plan of action for applying Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It intended to cooperate closely with UNHCR in implementing this plan of action. It was fully supportive of UNHCR's efforts to find a durable solution to prolonged situations, and on this point it welcomed creation of the section responsible for solutions and operations support. For a minority of refugees, resettlement remained the only viable solution. The Norwegian government had decided, for its part, to increase the annual resettlement quota for the current legislative period by 50%. It hoped, nevertheless, for more diverse

worldwide resettlement possibilities, better adapted to the needs of refugees. To that end, more countries should participate in UNHCR's resettlement programme. To ensure follow-up to the first high-level dialogue on migrations and development held in New York in September 2006, the Norwegian government would pay particular attention to migration issues in its development assistance and poverty reduction activities.

26. Mr. DABETIC (Serbia) said that the issue of refugees and internally displaced persons was still an acute problem for the Republic of Serbia. The national strategy adopted in an attempt to resolve this problem stressed repatriation and local integration as complementary approaches for finding a durable solution. A draft amendment to the 1992 law on refugees should be adopted shortly to facilitate the local integration process. That amendment contained provisions dealing with resettlement. For the Serbian government, voluntary return was the best durable solution to the problem of displaced persons. The restoration of property and the full and non-discriminatory respect for occupancy, tenancy and other property rights would appear to be the two key elements. All signatories to the Sarajevo Declaration should take steps to help resolve the problems that persisted in this field. Unfortunately, it had not been possible as yet to prepare a common implementation schedule, and the Croatian roadmap did not yet cover the questions of the status of holders of expired leases and validation of employment records.

27. There were currently 208,000 displaced persons originally from Kosovo-Metohija in Serbia, the neediest of whom were housed in centres financed 95% by the Serbian authorities. Internal displacements of minorities were continuing despite a seven-year international presence in the province. In the face of this alarming situation, it was essential to ensure that negotiations on the future status of Kosovo-Metohija produced a solution that would win the approval of all parties concerned. Any other solution would likely lead to population upheavals that would perpetuate ethnic cleansing.

28. The Serbian government appreciated UNHCR's efforts to oppose the forced return of minorities originating in the province of Kosovo-Metohija. Failing the conditions essential to their return to their province, it was neither legally nor practically possible to compel those people to settle in Serbia outside their home province, making them internally displaced persons. The Serbian delegation also thanked UNHCR for its assistance in implementing a suitable asylum system. The asylum law was expected to be adopted shortly. Serbia had also set up its first reception centre for asylum-seekers, with UNHCR assistance.

29. Despite all the problems encountered in the economic transition process, the Republic of Serbia was doing everything possible to assist refugees and internally displaced persons in its territory. In order to establish the conditions and guarantees necessary for displaced persons to return permanently to Kosovo-Metohija, on one hand, and to promote local integration of refugees through independent projects, the Serbian government would need the support of the international community. In this respect, it hoped that the needs of the UNHCR office in Belgrade would be fully taken into account in the next budget.

30. The Chair invited the High Commissioner for Refugees to respond to these interventions.

31. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner for Refugees) assured the representative of Japan that he was completely in favour of the concept of human security and that UNHCR wished to collaborate more closely with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). He expressed his profound gratitude to the Government of Kenya for the generosity and hospitality that Kenya had always shown in welcoming large numbers of refugees from neighbouring countries, and he noted Kenya's contribution to seeking a political solution to the crisis in Somalia, which had sparked new inflows of refugees to Kenya. He echoed the appeal to the international community to come to the aid of the affected areas and the host communities, and said that UNHCR had engaged in close dialogue with the various development players to ensure that such support was included in all development cooperation programmes.

32. In response to the Netherlands' statement, the High Commissioner stressed the importance he attached to the crucial problem of protecting women and girls. All senior staff within UNHCR were expected to observe the new accountability framework with respect to considering age, gender and diversity in each activity and programme. This principle must become part of the very culture of UNHCR. The High Commissioner highlighted the importance of the resettlement programmes established by Canada and Australia, and he joined in the Austrian delegation's homage to Mr. Kälén. He also welcomed the political openness demonstrated by the Ivorian government in continuing to receive refugees from the region and to encourage their local integration, despite that country's political and military crisis. He appealed to all UNHCR partners to step up their assistance for internally displaced persons, and called on all national political players to work at re-establishing peace in Côte d'Ivoire.

33. Noting that Mozambique, once a country of origin, was now becoming a host country, he regretted that UNHCR lacked the means to support the Mozambique government fully in its efforts to protect and assist refugees. That situation was a perfect illustration of the need for an internal reform that would reduce the portion of UNHCR operating expenses. On this point, the High Commissioner cited Norway's strong commitment to reform. Referring to the Serbian representative's intervention, the High Commissioner said that, in very complex political environments where organizations like his sometimes found it difficult to operate, sole priority must be accorded to refugees and other displaced persons. UNHCR's intervention was not dictated by political considerations, but by the concern to help refugees, and it was on this basis that UNHCR intervened in countries. The High Commissioner hoped that UNHCR would always be able to apply these clear rules.

34. Mr. MARKOTIC (Croatia), in response to those who felt his country posed a problem to the return of refugees in the region, noted the following specific points: after signature of the Sarajevo Declaration, Croatia was the first of the three parties to prepare a roadmap, which had been unanimously hailed as highly positive. The roadmap had subsequently been amended to take account of questions that Serbia regarded as

outstanding, in particular landownership and housing rights. Croatia had to date spent €3.6 billion from its own budget to support the return of refugees, and it was ready to participate in a joint operational matrix among the three States to facilitate the return and integration of refugees. Croatia considered that this question should be addressed from its humanitarian and social aspects, and should on no account be politicized.

35. Mr. MELEIKA (Egypt) fully supported Algeria's declaration on behalf of the Group of African States. He reaffirmed his country's support for the role that UNHCR was continuing to play in the world, and especially in Africa, despite the problems of security, inadequate financial resources, and difficulties in delivering humanitarian aid. With greater stability in various African countries, UNHCR could now pursue large-scale repatriation activities. It was essential, however, that the international community should seize this positive development to provide the assistance needed for reconstruction and reintegration of persons displaced by conflicts, so as to guarantee freely consented and durable repatriations.

36. While welcoming the reforms underway within UNHCR, Egypt hoped that they would not undermine staff in their motivation or their work. It reiterated its support for all the High Commissioner's ideas and plans for improving refugee protection. Egypt was working closely with the organization, which had a regional office in Cairo, and believed that the refugee problem in the country must be addressed in the broader framework of similar refugee situations in developing countries, and especially in Africa. The Egyptian government was ready to examine any arrangement that UNHCR might propose for improving the situation of refugees in Egypt, within a context of constructive dialogue, capacity-building programmes and shared responsibilities.

37. Mr. KUSSUMUA (Observer for Angola) thanked the High Commissioner for his assistance in the process underway since 2003 for repatriating Angolan citizens, in particular those in exile in neighbouring countries. From the outset, it was recognized that this operation was one of the most complex ever conducted by UNHCR in Africa, because of the problems inherent in a country emerging from a very long war. Thanks to this voluntary repatriation operation, more than 370,000 Angolans out of 600,000 exiles had been able to return to their country. The number of refugees was declining around the world and in Africa, thanks to the steps taken to find a durable solution to conflicts that had generated millions of refugees and displaced persons. The last four years had seen the emergence of a consensus leading to the establishment of peace and stability in Angola, in Sierra Leone, in Burundi and in Liberia, with the return of thousands of refugees to their home country, assisted by the international community and UNHCR. These outcomes could be seen not only in Africa but in the world as a whole, which had become aware that the only war that should be fought is the war against lack of access to health, education, employment and safe drinking water—in a word, the war on poverty.

38. The world was currently facing the growing phenomenon of illegal international migration and trafficking in human beings, as the fruits of underdevelopment. These migrations often involved the forced displacement of people seeking safety, and they did not necessarily benefit from international legal protection or UNHCR assistance. This

question, which related both to refugees and migrants, was a challenge to all countries and they must examine comprehensive and coherent measures of global scope, without excluding recourse to the provisions of certain international instruments.

39. Mr. COSTA (Romania) gave his full backing to Finland's declaration on behalf of the European Union. Romania was strongly committed to reinforcing the rights of refugees and of internally displaced persons, and it supported the actions of UNHCR to eliminate all legal measures that discriminated against refugees. Romania also shared concerns over racist and xenophobic behaviour. It considered that certain urgent questions called for durable solutions, such as socioeconomic integration of refugees in host countries, the resettlement of refugees who lacked adequate protection in their first country of asylum, and the implementation and harmonization of national legislation and practices relating to asylum, in accordance with the relevant European standards. In this context, Romania had adopted a new law on integration, intended to facilitate the integration of refugees and persons who needed additional protection. That law also placed Romania in a position to implement voluntary repatriation programmes, and to become a country of resettlement. Romania considered that UNHCR should pursue its policy of observing the principle of non-refoulement. In this connection, it pointed to the successful outcome of the case of the Uzbek refugees, who had been accepted by Romania and subsequently resettled in other countries last August. Romania was proud of having welcomed them, as evidence of its determination to become a reliable partner in the international sharing of burdens and responsibilities.

40. Following its accession to the European Union, Romania would have greater responsibilities vis-à-vis its neighbours to the east. It was ready to play an active role in regional and international cooperation and to contribute to the creation of functional asylum systems in southern and south-eastern Europe. Last June it had launched the Black Sea Forum, bringing together partners from the region and beyond to carry out informally some projects in areas of common interest, including asylum and migration.

41. Combatting human trafficking and violence against women, children and adolescents was at the top of Romania's priorities. The government was putting the finishing touches on a national strategy against human trafficking for the next four years, as well as an action programme. That strategy sought to institute a national system comprising surveillance and assessment of the trafficking phenomenon, in order to strengthen prevention, coordination, assistance to victims, and the prosecution of traffickers. Two government decisions in this field would come into effect during the month, following Romania's ratification last June of the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings. In addition, Romania had this year created a national agency for preventing human trafficking and providing aid to victims.

42. Mr. ALI (Bangladesh) drew attention to a document entitled "Addressing Mixed Migratory Movements: A 10-Point Plan of Action", which suggested that UNHCR intended to launch a new field of activity that would also cover short-term displacements of workers for economic reasons. Bangladesh wanted to know why UNHCR wanted to expand its activities into a field that was not really part of its mandate. A general debate

was needed to determine what UNHCR's involvement should be, and what form it should take. Such a debate was all the more important in light of the budgetary problems cited by the High Commissioner. Bangladesh asked the Secretariat to present a thorough conceptual document on the question, and to make contact with other institutions that had worked in this field. Bangladesh was ready to cooperate with UNHCR on this question.

43. Mr. Ali stressed that voluntary repatriation must always be the preferred solution. Bangladesh was one of the world's most densely populated countries, with a very low income per capita, and local integration was not possible. He asked UNHCR to seek alternative solutions, as it had often done.

44. Bangladesh welcomed the document entitled "Update on the situation in Asia and the Pacific", submitted by UNHCR. That document mentioned a steering group in Geneva responsible for the situation of refugees in Bangladesh, but the Bangladeshi delegation was not aware of the existence of this group. Bangladesh was still host to 20,000 refugees from Myanmar, which had declared its willingness to take them back. The delegation hoped that they would soon be able to return to their country, to pursue there a decent life and meet their needs. It hoped that UNHCR would offer its cooperation to this end.

45. Mr. JATTA (Observer for The Gambia) said that his country had limited resources and did not consider that it was the responsibility of asylum countries to concern themselves with the material needs of refugees. For that reason, after sharing its limited resources with the refugees it had accepted, and having granted them its protection, The Gambia was insisting that others share this burden with it. The country was devoting a portion of its limited resources to peacekeeping operations as a preventive strategy.

46. Since the last session of the committee, The Gambia had taken in two waves of refugees from the Casamance region of Senegal, the first between January and June 2006, when 1,600 persons were accepted. They were able to return home fairly promptly. However, since 16 August 2006 The Gambia had seen 5,247 refugees arrive from Casamance. Consistent with its obligations under the asylum treaties, as well as its own practice, the Government had advised the refugees and the international community that it would accept the refugees if they left the border zones to settle in the interior of the country. It agreed to allow humanitarian assistance to reach them on-site, but it had made clear that these arrangements were valid only if the refugee population did not exceed its current proportions; otherwise, refugees would have to settle in an assigned camp. These details were particularly important because UNHCR had decided to close its office in The Gambia, because of the organization's financial situation. Yet refugees would continue to come in from Casamance and to settle in the greater Banjul region. In the absence of any physical presence of UNHCR, that population could become a source of serious problems. The Gambia reiterated what it had already said the previous year, to the effect that all States must give priority to Africa's unresolved conflicts. The Gambia hoped in particular that negotiations over Casamance would recommence, in order to reach an agreement that would favour the launch of a peace process in Senegal.

47. Mr. SIMONETTI (Italy) associated his country fully with the declaration made by Finland in the name of the European Union. He proposed, pursuant to the high-level dialogue in the General Assembly on international migrations and development, and in light of the growing complexity of population movements, that the Executive Committee remind everyone how important it was today to deal with the problem of mixed migration movements that were by their nature irregular and prone to exploitation for human trafficking and the slave trade. As a protection agency, UNHCR could contribute greatly to controlling irregular migrations when they involved persons it was supposed to protect. In this connection, Italy strongly welcomed the High Commissioner's 10-point action plan for dealing with mixed migration movements, presented in July 2006, which called for the protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of refugees and migrants.

48. States could benefit from UNHCR's assistance and know-how in helping people to "migrate by choice and not by necessity", as the High Commissioner had said. This in fact had given rise to a joint mechanism between UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Italian Red Cross, designed to supervise and screen people arriving on the island of Lampedusa off the coast of Sicily, a mechanism that had proven its effectiveness and constituted a good example of cooperation within the European continent, even if much remained to be done to achieve the objectives of the Hague Programme. While Italy supported the High Commissioner's initiative to reform UNHCR's structure and management, it insisted that this must be a transparent process conducted in constant consultation with the Executive Committee and UNHCR staff.

49. The international community must not forget the question of security. Humanitarian workers were engaged in a daily effort to protect refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons and people repatriated under extremely difficult conditions. It was up to States to find solutions to the problems encountered by these humanitarian workers in an environment that was increasingly complex and changeable, and to see that the relevant instruments and policies were applied in the field.

50. Mr. CHAMBAS (Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)) said that, with the support of the international community, ECOWAS would continue to oversee the maintenance of peace and security in the West African region, which today was more peaceful, more secure, more stable, and more democratic. While the various conflicts that had sparked massive displacements of people and a grave humanitarian crisis in the region no longer existed, there were still some points of concern. Côte d'Ivoire had not yet achieved peace, and the elections planned for October 2006 would not take place. In Guinea-Bissau, ECOWAS was working with the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and various development partners to mobilize funding to meet the country's urgent needs, especially for reconstruction and security. The challenge posed in Sierra Leone—how to rebuild the country after its conflict and how to restore its economy—should not be underestimated, despite the progress made. That country was still in great need of the international community's support.

51. While the situation was improving, there were still thousands of outstanding refugee cases in certain member States of ECOWAS, for which UNHCR's assistance was vital.

Cooperation between ECOWAS and UNHCR had been fruitful, especially in terms of capacity building. Thanks to this cooperation, a plan of action had been prepared for 2007-2009, focusing on protection and on durable solutions to the refugee crisis in West Africa. In addition to the important instruments and international standards concerning refugees adopted by its member States, ECOWAS had approved in 1999 a protocol on free circulation and a protocol on the mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution, and for peacekeeping and security.

52. Mr. HANNING (Council of Europe) said that the objective of the Council of Europe was to protect human rights, to promote democracy and the rule of law, and to consolidate democratic stability, and that this offered many possibilities for cooperation with UNHCR. This cooperation, which took various forms, was focused currently on questions relating to the protection of asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons, and stateless persons. UNHCR and the Council of Europe were jointly organizing national workshops on European standards relating to the protection of refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers; workshops of this kind were to be held in 2006 in Armenia, Georgia, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Montenegro and Ukraine.

53. The Council of Europe and UNHCR were also cooperating through the Council of Europe Development Bank. In 1999 that Bank had earmarked €2.8 million for projects implemented wholly or partially by UNHCR. These included projects to deliver emergency assistance, housing, and support for local integration for refugees and displaced persons in south-eastern Europe. In November 2004, the Bank had granted a loan of €8 million to the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina to take in and re-house some 4,500 displaced persons registered by UNHCR.

54. The Council of Europe was pleased to be invited to participate in UNHCR's various meetings and events. Cooperation between these two organizations offered a clear demonstration that it was only by pooling their forces that agencies could cope with the threats and challenges facing the world today. The Council of Europe was looking forward to the High Commissioner's upcoming visit to Strasbourg, to pursue this cooperation further.

55. The Chair invited the High Commissioner to respond to these interventions.

56. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner for Refugees) responded to the Egyptian delegation that he had recently met with the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs to discuss how to pursue and improve cooperation between UNHCR and that country, which was accepting many refugees and was faced with numerous difficulties in guaranteeing them adequate protection. UNHCR, he said, was very happy to cooperate with Angola in returning a large number of refugees who had had to flee the war. The Angolan government had demonstrated a great sense of responsibility in organizing the return of the refugees who were still to be found in Zambia and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite its limited resources, UNHCR had freed up US\$4.5 million in support of this joint operation, which would be one of the largest ever undertaken. The High Commissioner paid tribute to the Government of Romania for the temporary

protection offered to Uzbek refugees. In this difficult situation, the Romanian government and people had acted with courage and had shown great hospitality and generosity.

57. Mr. Guterres thanked the Bangladesh delegation for its intervention, which had raised a potentially dangerous misunderstanding. It was quite clear that UNHCR's objective was not to become a migration management organization, but merely to guarantee the conditions necessary for providing the international protection to which the people caught up in these complex migrations were entitled. The High Commissioner was also pleased with the Bangladesh government's clear statement that solutions had to be found to the question of refugees from Myanmar who were still on Bangladeshi soil, despite the successful operations of a few years previously for repatriating Myanmar citizens. The two governments concerned, and the international community as well, would have to mobilize in order to close the two refugee camps still open in Bangladesh, in which living conditions were extremely harsh.

58. The High Commissioner gave assurance to The Gambia that, with the probability of new flows of refugees and asylum-seekers, UNHCR was changing its plans: not only was it no longer intending to close its local office, but it was in fact planning to reinforce its capacities and to mobilize resources from its reserves to help the country face the situation. It went without saying that UNHCR and the authorities would analyze the situation jointly and decide together on how to proceed, depending on whether the problem turned out to be temporary or more persistent. The High Commissioner assured Italy of UNHCR's willingness to continue the cooperation instituted in Lampedusa and in the various commissions for examining refugee cases, of which it was a member. UNHCR, he said, was proud to be a partner of ECOWAS, which had taken remarkable action for preventing and resulting conflicts. As to the Council of Europe, this was a true symbol for the defence of human rights and the promotion of democracy not only in Europe but around the world.

59. The Chair invited delegations to share with the High Commissioner their observations and comments.

60. Mr. SAMBOU (Senegal) explained that the refugee crisis in southern Senegal was on the way to being settled, with signature of peace accords with the Casamance separatists, and that confrontations between the Senegalese army and the separatists were now becoming rare. Senegal and The Gambia were two separate countries but one people, and it was understandable that when there were problems in Senegal, refugees would seek shelter in The Gambia. This situation, as he had said previously, could be resolved only through negotiations with The Gambia, and Mr. Sambou thanked that country for envisioning a negotiated settlement.

61. Mr. ALI (Bangladesh) thanked the High Commissioner for clarifying the situation and for reiterating that UNHCR's mandate was limited. Bangladesh would not be opposed to broadening that mandate if necessary, but it would be essential to determine

what UNHCR could contribute beyond the organizations already in place, so as not to generate confusion and overlapping of activities.

62. Mrs. SILVESTRU (Republic of Moldova) welcomed the decline in the number of refugees in Europe, thanks largely to voluntary repatriation, but was concerned to see that the number of internally displaced persons was rising. By definition, these people, because they were not in another country's territory, could not benefit from international protection, nor could they claim refugee status. Thus the provisions of the international instruments on the status of refugees offered them no protection. It was up to UNHCR, then, to follow up systematically all cases of persons in this situation.

63. The Chair invited the High Commissioner to respond to these interventions.

64. Mr. GUTERRES (High Commissioner For Refugees), responding to Bangladesh, said that the mandate and missions entrusted to UNHCR were quite enough for it to handle, but that it must ensure that it understood the very complex phenomena inherent in its fields of action. In response to the Republic of Moldova, he said that UNHCR, when it encouraged the repatriation of refugees, was very careful to ensure that the persons it was helping to repatriate would not become internally displaced persons, and that they could be reintegrated into their communities of origin. With respect to internal displacements, he insisted that UNHCR did not intervene in the case of internally displaced persons when they wanted to seek cross-border asylum and to obtain the corresponding protection.

The meeting rose at 5:50 p.m.