



General Assembly

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Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Sixty-first session

Summary record of the 647th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 8 October 2010, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Woolcott.....(Australia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Election of officers

1. **Ms. Nee-Whang** (Ghana), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, nominated Mr. Badr (Egypt) for the office of Chairperson.
2. **Ms. Assaker** (Lebanon) seconded the nomination.
3. *Mr. Badr was elected Chairperson by acclamation.*
4. **Mr. Zvekić** (Serbia) nominated Mr. Knutsson (Sweden) for the office of Vice-Chairperson.
5. **Ms. Sobhan** (Bangladesh) seconded the nomination.
6. *Mr. Knutsson was elected Vice-Chairperson by acclamation.*
7. **Ms. Pitotti** (United States of America) nominated Ms. Lascurain (Mexico) for the office of Rapporteur.
8. **Mr. Kusimba** (Kenya) seconded the nomination.
9. *Ms. Lascurain was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*
10. **Mr. Badr** (Egypt) said that his priorities as Chairperson would be to continue efforts to reach consensus on the difficult issues facing UNHCR, to support the efforts of UNHCR to provide the necessary resources in the field, to seek a consensus on a stronger role for UNHCR in providing assistance to persons displaced as a result of natural disasters and on reducing the protection gap without using earmarked resources, and to strengthen the dialogue between donor countries and host countries. Direct financial contributions to UNHCR were very much appreciated but the burden borne by host countries with limited resources should not be forgotten. He would also pursue the dialogue on equitable geographical distribution at all levels within the secretariat and would support the efforts of UNHCR in that regard.
11. **Mr. Knutsson** (Sweden) said that he looked forward to working with his colleagues in the Bureau, with the High Commissioner and the entire organization.
12. *The meeting was suspended at 10.40 a.m. and resumed at 10.50 a.m.*

Adoption of the report of the sixty-first session of the Executive Committee

13. **Ms. Pitotti** (Rapporteur), introduced the draft report of the sixty-first session. Sections I and II provided an overview of the work of the session; section III contained the draft conclusions and decisions, as approved by the members of the Executive Committee; annex II contained the conclusion and decision adopted by the Executive Committee at the extraordinary meeting held on 8 December 2009. Annex III contained the Chairperson's summary of the general debate, which he had provided earlier in the week. The final version of the report would be submitted for consideration by the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report.
14. **Ms. Pollack** (United States of America), referring to paragraph 7 of the Chairman's summary of the general debate concerning the responsibility of UNHCR for persons displaced as a result of natural disasters, said that the United States read the second sentence to mean that further consultations with Member States must precede any action taken by UNHCR to assume that responsibility formally.
15. **The Chairperson** said he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft report of the sixty-first session of the Executive Committee.

16. *It was so decided.*

Closing statement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

17. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed delegations' unanimous recognition of the role played by asylum States, the heavy burden that providing asylum placed on many countries and communities, and the sacrifices made to ensure that people received proper protection and assistance. UNHCR had provided limited assistance in areas such as the sustainability of returns, support for local integration, regional development for refugee-impacted areas and the rehabilitation of former refugee settlements. However, it did not have the capacity or resources to do much more. A new deal on burden sharing was needed, to ensure that current levels of generosity and hospitality were fully matched by the solidarity of the international community. All United Nations bodies, development agencies and international financial organizations should jointly support regional development in refugee-affected areas impacted in order to assist the populations that had been sharing their meagre resources with refugees.

18. Many delegations had rightly drawn attention to the risks that UNHCR staff faced. Rather than avoiding the most dangerous locations, UNHCR staff strove to establish the conditions that allowed the Office to have a presence, even when colleagues had been killed there in the line of duty. It was important that all parties in the international system made a commitment to preserve the autonomy of humanitarian space, guarantee that it did not shrink further and was reopened wherever it had closed.

19. While noting the concerns that had been raised, he had been encouraged by the debate on the potential involvement of UNHCR in protection in natural disasters. His proposal should serve as a good basis for further discussion with members, and he hoped to find an objective approach to addressing those concerns. The financial resources for natural disasters came out of different budget lines or different decisions from those used to allocate resources for core UNHCR activities. The Office's experience in providing protection for people who had been internally displaced owing to conflict had shown that the additional activity had in fact contributed to increased financial resources for refugees. The Office would submit an action plan to meet members' concerns, particularly on protection staff capacity. He assured members that nothing would be done to undermine in any way the integrity of the strong core mandate of UNHCR for protecting refugees and stateless persons.

20. He took note of the concerns expressed about transparency, accountability and oversight. The terms of reference of the new independent advisory and audit committee would be discussed with members. As in many other international bodies, a multiplicity of oversight systems functioned in UNHCR, including the Inspector General's Office, the Policy Development and Evaluation Service, the Joint Inspection Unit, the Ethics Office, the Ombudsman, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, the external auditor and the new independent oversight committee. He therefore called for some reflection to ensure that there was system-wide agreement on the importance and specific functions of each body and on effective coordination.

21. Commending delegations for their commitment to participating in the 2011 commemorations, he emphasized the need for a new protection compact which would bring together UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, member States and NGOs in new partnerships and forms of interaction, building new burden-sharing mechanisms to address protection gaps. While there had been clear consensus that the 1951 Refugee Convention should not be amended, further discussion on the possibility of developing new instruments would be necessary. He appealed to all States and international organizations to consider ways in which they could take full advantage of the 2011 commemorations to do everything in their power to improve the protection that they delivered. He suggested that

States might be able to lift reservations to conventions, ratify conventions, especially those on statelessness, and strengthen their asylum legislation, refugee status determination bodies, migration structures, and border management. UNHCR, other international organizations and NGOs should explore ways of developing their common capacity to address the needs of the people for whom they cared. He felt sure that, by the end of 2011, the international community would offer refugees, stateless persons and displaced persons significantly stronger protection than was currently the case.

Closing of the session

22. *After the customary exchange of courtesies, **the Chairperson** declared the sixty-first session of the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees closed.*

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.