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

Fifty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 571st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 29 September 2003, at 4.30 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. BOULGARIS (Switzerland)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.30 p.m.

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

1. Mr. MAUER (Switzerland) said that his delegation deplored the recent tragic attacks on United Nations personnel in Iraq and stressed that the safety of humanitarian staff must be a central concern of the international community. While welcoming the success of the UNHCR 2004 process and endorsing the removal of the time limitation on the mandate of the High Commissioner's Office, Switzerland attached great importance to the strategic reviews that the Office intended to conduct every 10 years in collaboration with the Executive Committee. His Government also welcomed the Office's stated commitment to cooperation in identifying durable solutions to refugee problems and strengthening international protection. UNHCR should be encouraged to play a more visible role in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, forge closer links with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and lend greater support to the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP).

2. UNHCR should be given adequate resources to fulfil its mandate. However, it should also be more cost-conscious in its programming and operational activities and should prioritize them strictly according to refugee needs. For its part, Switzerland would endeavour to make available its total contribution for 2004 before the end of the current year. At least half of the money would be in the form of unearmarked contributions, with the total amount expected to match the level of contributions for 2003.

3. The Convention Plus initiative merited the support of the international community. Switzerland intended to play its part by focusing on secondary and irregular movements and launching a dialogue on the respective responsibilities of countries of origin, transit and destination. It was also gratifying to learn that the Agenda for Protection was being used by UNHCR as a planning tool both at headquarters and in the field, and that regular progress reports on the implementation of the Agenda were envisaged. It should be remembered, however, that implementation was primarily the responsibility of States parties and civil society in the countries concerned.

4. Mr. SHERPAO (Pakistan) said that Pakistan had been actively involved in all the processes referred to by the High Commissioner in his opening statement. While fully supporting the 4Rs and Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR) initiatives, his Government nevertheless had some reservations about the Development through Local Integration (DLI) approach, which could not be an effective solution in situations involving millions of refugees who had the potential to change the socio-economic and ethnic balance of the host country.

5. Following the establishment of the interim Government in Afghanistan in 2002, some 1.5 million Afghan refugees had returned to their homeland voluntarily from Pakistan. The repatriation operation had been accomplished despite UNHCR's resource constraints and the precarious security situation. In addition, Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR had signed a tripartite agreement in Brussels in March 2003, which, it was hoped, would provide further impetus to the repatriation process. Nevertheless, it was anticipated that a fairly large number of Afghan refugees would remain in Pakistan for the foreseeable future, and his Government therefore urged UNHCR and donors not to lose sight of the problem.

6. While appreciating the efforts of the United States of America and its coalition partners to improve the security situation in Afghanistan, his Government was acutely aware that refugees had to be given a real incentive to return, for example by designing individual or family return packages guaranteeing employment in targeted labour-intensive reconstruction projects. Pakistan had made available reconstruction assistance in the amount of US\$ 100 million, and it urged other donors to honour their commitments.

7. His Government welcomed the High Commissioner's offer to conduct a census of Afghan refugees currently in Pakistan, because accurate statistics would facilitate operational planning and could even be used as the basis for an electoral roll in Afghanistan.

8. Convention Plus was certainly an interesting initiative, but his Government had some reservations about the composition of the High Commissioner's Forum, as many of the issues that had been raised were better suited to discussion in statutory bodies. No measures should be taken that would transform a refugee situation into a migratory problem for the host country or the international community. Finally, his Government was counting on international support to repair the environmental damage caused by the protracted refugee presence in Pakistan.

9. Mr. ENDO (Japan) said that his Government supported the Convention Plus strategy as a means to promote international responsibility and burden sharing with special emphasis on the productive capacity of refugees rather than on their vulnerabilities. Japan would continue to support the DAR, 4Rs and DLI concepts, voluntary repatriation and resettlement to third countries, the common thread in which was the notion of human security and peace-building. Accordingly, UNHCR should press home the need for human security as a tool for reinforcing international solidarity in specific refugee situations.

10. Through a series of international conferences and targeted financial measures, Japan had endeavoured to bring human security into focus at both the policy and the operational level in various refugee crises around the world - in Afghanistan, Africa, Colombia and Sri Lanka - while never overlooking the relevant political context. His country would continue to pursue its humanitarian agenda, working both within UNHCR and in parallel with it (for example, through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and various Japanese NGOs), and invited UNHCR to share and translate into reality its vision of human security. Japan was also particularly interested in the proposed innovation of UNHCR's financial management under the current unified budget system, with a view to making the system more user-friendly and more accountable.

11. Mr. PHATTIYAKUL (Thailand), after expressing his delegation's deep regret at the recent loss of life among United Nations personnel engaged in humanitarian work, said that the emergencies in Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa referred to by the High Commissioner in his opening statement had highlighted the key role played by the Organization, including UNHCR, in alleviating suffering and assisting the vulnerable. Yet UNHCR could not afford to pay attention only to high-profile emergencies: it must seek to address all humanitarian situations, in whatever continent they arose.

12. Thailand had been an active participant in the UNHCR 2004 process and had provided constructive input, advocating, for example, greater involvement by UNHCR with other elements of the United Nations system, particularly the political, peacekeeping and development

functions, in addressing refugee issues. With regard to governance, Thailand was also anxious for the Office to keep its role under review and to remain conscious at all times of the linkage between solutions and UNHCR's ongoing mandate. His delegation believed that UNHCR governance required the full participation of all Executive Committee members, whether host countries or donor, on an equal footing. UNHCR should be given the resources that it needed for its protection and assistance functions, and Thailand called on donors to assist UNHCR and host countries in a spirit of international burden sharing.

13. His delegation was encouraged by the fact that UNHCR's general policy directions reflected many of Thailand's own objectives and priorities, and that the High Commissioner had prioritized burden sharing and the promotion of durable solutions. He remained hopeful that the Convention Plus process would lead to concrete outcomes that could assist developing host countries and strengthen their support for the international refugee regime; due attention should be paid to issues of particular interest to developing host countries, such as standby arrangements and reintegration and reconstruction agreements. Reaching durable solutions should not be regarded as a primarily regional responsibility: it required international burden sharing and global cooperation, and his delegation counted on UNHCR to ensure that a balanced outcome was achieved.

14. The abuse of asylum systems was a problem affecting not only developed countries but also developing host countries. Thailand's own humanitarian tradition had been put to the test by recent incidents. Some of those had, regrettably, involved individuals who had been given person of concern status by UNHCR, and his Government expected the Office to ensure that those receiving assistance were fully advised of their obligations to the host country: rights and freedoms came with responsibilities.

15. Thailand continued to host more than 112,000 displaced persons with no immediate prospect of durable solutions. Continuous efforts would be required in order to prepare the conditions for their return. The 4Rs approach and a focus on development in conjunction with relevant actors would help to ensure sustainable returns and prevent a recurrence of outflows.

16. As a host country, Thailand had valued UNHCR's cooperation in assisting the displaced persons on its western border, but his delegation wished to reiterate that humanitarian action depended on interaction not only with central Governments but also with local authorities and communities. Hosting refugees and displaced persons was a dynamic, not a static, exercise, which imposed costs on local resources, and his Government was greatly concerned at the degradation of the environment in shelter areas. He called for continued assistance, without precondition, in rehabilitating shelter areas in order to ensure that they could accommodate additional entrants and thus sustain the level of local support for humanitarian work. It would also be appreciated if UNHCR could conduct a fresh assessment of environmental impacts in shelter areas in Thailand, with a view to restoration and prevention.

17. Mr. de JONG (Netherlands) said that he associated himself with the statement made by the representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union. He complimented the High Commissioner on the outcome of the UNHCR 2004 process, which would provide a strong basis for policy implementation in the coming years.

18. The greatest challenge facing UNHCR was the strengthening of its field operations, through improvements in management and internal organization and the development of strong partnerships. Such partnerships should involve more than mere coordination: cooperation was what UNHCR should strive for. His delegation requested UNHCR to pay adequate attention to the gender perspective and the role that might be played by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and to participate fully in coordination under the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as well as in strategic planning with other actors in the field.

19. In the area of migration management, he welcomed the formation of the Geneva Migration Group, which would help to attain maximum complementarity in relation to the asylum/migration nexus.

20. Especially in the light of the recent tragic events in Baghdad and Afghanistan, his delegation wished to express its appreciation for those working in the field under often dangerous and difficult circumstances. It welcomed the introduction of UNHCR's new human resources policy, which would strengthen field operations. Adequate levels of high-quality professional staffing were a prerequisite for the implementation of UNHCR's global mandate.

21. The Netherlands welcomed the proposals to strengthen UNHCR's donor base and supported greater flexibility in the functioning of the unified budget. His delegation also wished to reiterate that UNHCR's core functions on protection and the Inspector General's function should be funded from the Annual Programme Budget. Contributions to the Budget were, however, insufficient, and he encouraged States to do better in terms of burden and responsibility sharing.

22. The Netherlands intended to keep its unearmarked voluntary contribution to the Annual Programme Budget at €40.9 million, the same level as in 2003. Additional funding might also be provided for specific situations, based on humanitarian needs in regions in conflict, the performance of organizations and the quality of the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). In the current year, the Netherlands had provided an additional earmarked US\$ 7 million and intended to contribute a further €5 million to the Afghanistan operation.

23. His delegation looked forward to discussing the possibility of further agreements similar to the tripartite agreement between Afghanistan, UNHCR and the Netherlands, which had proved important in building confidence and securing readmission. It also stressed the importance of the swift return of asylum-seekers not found to be in need of international protection.

24. While respecting the High Commissioner's concern at the plight of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal, the Netherlands considered it to be of crucial importance that UNHCR or some other international organization should continue to play a significant role in the verification, repatriation and resettlement process.

25. In Africa, the problem of insufficient contributions had led to declining standards of assistance. Refugees' quality of life depended on cooperation and international commitment on the part of countries of first asylum, transit and destination, as well as countries of origin, in the search for durable solutions. UNHCR must also set priorities in a transparent manner and adjust them when necessary.

26. The Netherlands welcomed UNHCR's strong focus on strengthening protection capacities in the region and intended to co-finance the proposals submitted for funding at the European Union level. Strengthening protection implied international responsibility and burden sharing; any special agreement to strengthen protection in the region must take account of the interests and participation of all the countries involved, but first and foremost the interests of refugees. Strengthening protection in the region should be high on the agenda, both in the Executive Committee and the Forum process under the Convention Plus initiative.

27. Ms. VINCENT (Canada) said that her delegation supported the High Commissioner's efforts to reintegrate the organization and to explore new approaches to meeting refugees' needs. Protection was a major issue for Canada. In 2002, more than 10,000 refugees had been resettled in Canada and 12,000 others, who had come as asylum-seekers, had been locally integrated.

28. Canada noted with grave concern that there had been instances over the past year where the vital principle of non-refoulement had not been respected, despite the fact that it was widely recognized to be part of customary international law. Canada called on all States to honour their obligations and cooperate with UNHCR. The first steps had, however, already been taken towards implementing the Agenda for Protection. In Canada's view, protection must be addressed in a holistic manner, taking account not only of legal considerations but also of physical and social aspects.

29. Her delegation believed that UNHCR's review of protracted refugee situations would make a valuable contribution to discussions on durable solutions for refugees, the ultimate objective of the international refugee regime.

30. In the context of Convention Plus, Canada had begun promoting the strategic use of resettlement as a way of complementing the 1951 Convention with burden- and responsibility-sharing arrangements. Resettlement, however, was only one aspect of a comprehensive approach. All States had a responsibility to seek durable solutions for refugees, including providing opportunities for local integration where appropriate.

31. Referring to the evaluations concerning refugee women, refugee children and community services, she said that Canada would continue to support UNHCR and other partners in their actions in the area of prevention of sexual violence.

32. Despite the considerable success achieved in the UNHCR 2004 process over a relatively brief period, the discussions on several key issues had been too short. A number of points had yet to be debated, therefore, including the strengthening of UNHCR coordination within the United Nations system and improved use of the Executive Committee and the Standing Committee.

33. Canada intended to increase its baseline contribution to UNHCR by Can\$ 3 million. To date, it had contributed Can\$ 32 million, including Can\$ 14 million in baseline contributions, for 2003. Canada supported efforts to stabilize UNHCR's funding arrangements.

34. Mr. RUDDOCK (Australia) said that the proposal to extend UNHCR's mandate for an indefinite period, put forward as part of the UNHCR 2004 process, was an acknowledgement that refugees could no longer be seen as a transitory phenomenon. However, it should not be taken to mean that States were powerless to prevent the emergence of refugee situations or to find solutions for refugees. In the past, Governments and international humanitarian organizations had perhaps been too reactive, allowing external forces to dictate events and set protection priorities, letting refugee situations drag on too long and being satisfied with piecemeal responses. It was timely to ask how Governments could regain the initiative in managing refugee situations.

35. There were some promising signs: the numbers of refugees and persons of concern had fallen by more than 25 per cent between 1995 and 2002; the number of refugees had fallen from 12 million at the end of 2001 to around 10.4 million by the end of 2002. Those improvements had resulted from changes in the political situation that held out the prospect of resolving two of the world's longest-standing caseloads, Afghan and Iraqi refugees. There had also been promising signs that caseloads were diminishing in some areas of Africa and the Asia-Pacific region.

36. More could still be done, however, to regain the initiative. In the first place, it was important to focus on comprehensive solutions. In that regard, the High Commissioner's Forum had helped to focus attention on holistic approaches. Australia strongly supported the High Commissioner's call for States and UNHCR to work together in negotiating results-oriented special agreements in order to resolve caseloads. However, ideas must be matched with action.

37. Secondly, more support must be given to countries of first asylum in protecting the extensive populations that they were hosting, and the appropriate development linkages must be established.

38. Thirdly, the role of orderly international resettlement must be expanded for those refugees in need of a new permanent home, on the basis of priorities set by UNHCR and the international community. A situation had developed where many refugees arranged new homes for themselves, by irregular movements and, in some cases, through illegal means. A great deal of money was spent on complex, legalistic asylum processes that attracted large numbers of abusive claimants, yet very little attention was paid to orderly resettlement.

39. Fourthly, consideration must be given to more innovative use of the tools of protection. In a politically volatile world, greater use might be made of temporary protection and temporary periods of stay before deciding on any allocation of scarce permanent places.

40. Fifthly, once the source of persecution no longer existed, refugee situations should be "managed down" by providing safe, voluntary repatriation of refugees, and return to the country of origin for those who were not refugees.

41. In circumstances where it was difficult to obtain sufficient funding for UNHCR to meet all the demands placed upon it, managing down refugee situations was critical to freeing up resources so that attention could be turned to other long-standing caseloads and to responding to new and emerging refugee challenges.
42. As a consequence of the UNHCR 2004 process, there might be scope for UNHCR to review its own internal structures and consider reshaping itself to anticipate and meet future challenges.
43. Australia continued to do what it could, both individually and with regional partners, to regain the initiative. Its programmes responded to changing world protection needs, shifting the focus of international resettlement activity to Africa. Thanks to its success in combating irregular arrivals, Australia had expanded its offshore resettlement programme by 40 per cent. It continued to upgrade its extensive post-arrival services, enabling refugees brought to Australia as permanent settlers to become full participants in its multicultural society.
44. Australia continued to work with regional partners to supply the protection needs of persons moving irregularly through the region and facilitate the return to their country of origin of persons not in need of protection. It was working to advance discussion of protection and migration issues within the framework of the Asian-Pacific Consultations (APC) and the follow-up to the "Bali II" meeting held in April 2003. Australia also welcomed the increased involvement of UNHCR in protecting capacity-building efforts in the region through the opening of a new office in Papua New Guinea.
45. More than \$A 32 million of his Government's aid budget had been allocated to support protection assistance and reintegration programmes for refugees. Significant additional funds were used for programmes and technical assistance that increased economic growth and strengthened social services, thereby addressing the root causes of people movement.
46. Australia looked forward to working with UNHCR under its renewed mandate and with the members of the Executive Committee with a view to finding lasting solutions for those refugees most in need.
47. Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that the changing nature and complexity of refugee situations and the significant shift in the dynamics of burden sharing lent greater urgency to the need for contemplating the direction of future efforts. The global refugee regime should be redefined to reflect current realities, including the emergence of a new category of internally displaced persons, namely ecological refugees.
48. Further thought should be given to the operationalization of UNHCR 2004 and the Convention Plus initiative, in view of their far-reaching consequences. His delegation was pleased that the UNHCR 2004 process reflected a more inclusive multilateral regime to meet refugee challenges and hoped that the ongoing review of UNHCR's role and mandate would lead to a more responsive and responsible refugee regime.
49. Bangladesh supported a more comprehensive framework to achieve durable solutions for refugees. The 4Rs, DAR and DLI approaches had their merits, but they were not applied universally. Each refugee situation was unique and needed to be addressed in its particular

context. Moreover, such approaches should be pursued within the framework of a more humane, responsible and equitable burden-sharing mechanism. It was disheartening that such a mechanism had yet to be developed. Burden sharing should not be viewed simply in terms of cash contributions, since that would ignore the tremendous social, economic and political costs borne by host developing countries.

50. Bangladesh was concerned by UNHCR's critical financial situation, which had a serious impact on refugee operations. That problem should be addressed urgently and efforts to explore new and innovative funding mechanisms must be pursued. UNHCR should continue to seek strategic alliances and collaboration with other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations. It should also receive a larger share of the United Nations regular budget and more sustained commitment from donors. In order to fulfil its mandate effectively, UNHCR needed to be assured of a steady inflow of resources.

51. Bangladesh was aware of the responsibilities that devolved on refugee host countries. In the past two decades it had twice hosted large influxes of refugees from Myanmar. Thanks to sustained efforts, bilateral commitments and UNHCR's active support, the majority of refugees had returned home. A residual caseload of 19,830 persons remained to be repatriated.

52. Encouraging progress in the repatriation of the refugees had been achieved in recent months, and he hoped that the momentum would be sustained. His Government was still committed to returning the remaining refugees to their homes in dignity and safety. It underscored the need for effective and sustainable reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for returnees once they reached Myanmar.

53. The impact of hosting such a large refugee population for a prolonged period of time could not be overemphasized. In spite of its population density and resource constraints, Bangladesh had continued to shelter refugees. It hoped that support for the operation and the repatriation process would not be affected by "donor fatigue" or by UNHCR's funding constraints. Bangladesh counted on the international community's generous and sincere support for a final resolution of the situation.

54. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, welcomed the reform process that the High Commissioner had initiated. The Group had been actively involved in the deliberations process with a view to giving UNHCR a larger, more visible and more incisive role within the United Nations system. It stressed the need to concentrate on UNHCR's core activity, namely the effective protection of refugees, displaced persons and status people, in order to avoid any functional overlap with other players in the humanitarian field, and to ensure that UNHCR was not perceived as or turned into a kind of development agency.

55. During the deliberations on the UNHCR 2004 process, the question of the duration of UNHCR's mandate had been raised. The African Group considered that relative flexibility on the subject could result in greater mobilization of financial resources and fewer constraints on programme implementation. However, such an arrangement, which it hoped would be adopted by consensus, should not be taken by policy makers as a signal to abandon efforts to resolve the

crises that led to refugee problems. The African States believed that the completion of the mandate of the Programme of the High Commissioner was contingent upon the final elimination of the phenomenon which had given rise to the establishment of his Office.

56. The African States viewed UNHCR as an apolitical, neutral and multilateral institution which should continue to be broad-based and to work on the principle of consensus. It did not see the proposed changes as moving in the right direction and believed that they could lead to a sterile politicization of negotiations, undermining the institution's humanitarian mission.

57. The African Group supported the idea of convening a ministerial meeting every five years to draw attention to the international community's efforts on the question of refugees and provide them with the necessary political impetus. Solidarity was vital to the resolution of refugee problems.

58. Cooperation between UNHCR and regional actors such as the African Union must be strengthened. To that end he welcomed the cooperation established between the African Union and UNHCR in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to build the capacities of African countries hosting refugees to afford international protection.

59. The African States commended the High Commissioner for his comprehensive work on the Convention Plus process and it continued to support the Convention. They had appreciated the suggestions made at the inaugural meeting of the Forum, the outcome of which had confirmed the Group's belief in the need for greater efforts to attain the fundamental objectives of the Agenda for Protection, based on the spirit of the 1951 Convention and its 1966 Protocol, and other existing international and regional instruments, including the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention. The process should serve the interests and concerns of refugees and not shift responsibility at the expense of more balanced burden sharing.

60. The African States viewed Convention Plus as a tool for addressing the protection requirements of refugees in developing countries, particularly in Africa, where the majority of the world's refugees and displaced persons were living in a situation of prolonged deprivation and misery. The new measures should focus on the development of appropriate frameworks for greater and more equitable burden sharing between countries. The African Group also stressed the need to establish and adopt a set of principles for burden-sharing arrangements with a view to building national capacities to protect refugees.

61. Other protection measures should be envisaged, such as securing sufficient and adequate financing for UNHCR operations and developing targeted and well-designed assistance programmes along the lines of the DAR initiative. The African Group was open to any initiative aimed at achieving those objectives and was willing to consider any new approach to strengthen refugee protection.

62. The Group commended the High Commissioner for stressing, in the 2004 Programme Budget, the importance of strengthening protection activities for field operations and of the search for durable solutions. However, it was concerned at the steady decline in UNHCR's

financial resources. Urgent attention should be given to the devastating effects of budget cuts on the already precarious social and security situation of refugees, particularly in Africa. The Group was particularly concerned about the conditions placed on resources by donors. That policy led to great disparities in the assistance provided to refugee populations, particularly in Africa, where it had been reduced to an absolute minimum. For example, per capita expenditure for refugees in Croatia amounted to US\$ 300, as compared with US\$ 51 in Guinea.

63. The 2004 field operations budget did not reflect refugees' current needs and illustrated the difficulties of reconciling a resource-based budget with a needs-based budget. The African Group therefore supported efforts to strengthen partnerships with other operational actors and, where possible, to include refugees in programmes as development actors. While it looked forward to receiving the Country Operations Plans for 2005, in which the new approach was to be outlined, it wished to stress that UNHCR's role should be to serve as a catalyst.

64. The African Group was aware of the difficulty of evaluating, in monetary terms, the contribution made by developing countries, which hosted the majority of the world's refugees. That contribution was a real one, a fact that all stakeholders should remember. The Group noted that account had been taken of that factor in the proposals to expand and diversify UNHCR's donor base.

65. With regard to the Base Level model, the African Group did not wish to see any change in the voluntary nature of cash contributions. However, it did encourage the High Commissioner to undertake bilateral discussions with donor countries willing to implement the model in a flexible manner, taking account of the specific circumstances of each country concerned.

66. The African Group appealed to donor countries, when providing financial assistance, to bear in mind the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on refugee populations. It welcomed UNHCR's decision to co-sponsor UNAIDS. The decision could lead to future partnerships with the World Health Organization in host countries. The Group was willing to consider any initiatives from the High Commissioner and the Executive Committee in that regard.

67. Mr. KESSEDJIAN (France) said that his country was particularly concerned at the increasing difficulties facing humanitarian workers. While the tragic attacks on the United Nations premises in Baghdad were now uppermost in people's minds, many other humanitarian workers had been subjected to acts of aggression that had often proved fatal. The safety of humanitarian personnel must be an absolute priority for everyone and efforts should be made to ensure respect for their work by all persons, in all places and at all times.

68. With regard to budgetary questions, his delegation welcomed the improvement in UNHCR's financial position over the previous year, but wished to underline the importance of a unified structure for UNHCR's budget. France lent its full support to increasing the allocation from the United Nations regular budget for UNHCR as a just reflection of the importance of UNHCR's mission and mandate. Its support would not falter in the discussions to be held in the Fifth Committee during the General Assembly session in October.

69. With regard to international protection, UNHCR was to be congratulated for the quality of its work. Its initiatives illustrated the great diversity of its field operations, the primary objective of which was to protect refugees and asylum-seekers, particularly in emergency

situations. In such situations, a good and accurate knowledge of the movement of each affected population was indispensable. His delegation therefore commended UNHCR's efforts in regard to registration and security in refugee camps. UNHCR's work in the complex crisis affecting Côte d'Ivoire had been exemplary. The search for durable refugee solutions was an entirely appropriate objective for UNHCR, provided that it did not in any way detract from the Office's mandate.

70. With regard to asylum, efforts were being made at the national and European levels to harmonize the asylum system. UNHCR had expressed concern at the slow progress of negotiations at Brussels on the drawing up of guidelines on asylum. It was true that discussions in European institutions were often protracted and frustrating. However, his delegation was convinced that they would succeed in creating a more accessible, more equitable and better organized asylum system.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.