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

Fifty-eighth session

#### SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 617th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Friday, 5 October 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MTESA (Zambia)

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

MEETINGS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE IN 2008 (agenda item 10)

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FIFTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 11)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that agenda items 10 and 11 would be considered together and that the relevant draft decisions (Draft decision 1 on the nature, value and use of Executive Committee conclusions on international protection, Decision 3 on the programme of work of the Standing Committee in 2008, Draft decision 4 on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2007-2008, Draft decision 5 on extending the input in the work of the Executive Committee from non-governmental organizations and Draft decision 6 on the provisional agenda of the fifty-ninth session of the Executive Committee) would be incorporated in the report of the fifty-eighth session, which would be presented for adoption under agenda item 14.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (agenda item 12)

2. Mr. THORNE (United Kingdom) nominated Mr. Boudewijn Van Eenennaam (Netherlands) for the office of Chairman.
3. Mr. PHUANGKETKEOW (Thailand) seconded the nomination.
4. *Mr. Van Eenennaam (Netherlands) was elected Chairman by acclamation.*
5. Ms. FORERO UCROS (Colombia) nominated Ms. Laura Thompson (Costa Rica) for the office of Vice-Chairman.
6. Mr. LAASSEL (Morocco) seconded the nomination.
7. *Ms. Thompson (Costa Rica) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.*
8. Ms. POLLACK (United States of America) proposed that Ms. Emina Tudakovic (Canada) should be re-elected Rapporteur.
9. Ms. AL AKI (Lebanon) seconded the proposal.
10. *Ms. Tudakovic (Canada) was re-elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*
11. Mr. VAN EENENNAAM (Netherlands) offered some words of thanks. At his request, slides were projected, showing alternating images the current session and of refugees, in order to demonstrate the importance of never losing sight of the nature of the Committee's mission.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 13)

12. Mr. JO (Republic of Korea) welcomed the decision of UNHCR to transfer its administrative functions closer to the site of its operations but invited the agency to review its recruitment procedures and give preference to candidates from countries currently under-represented.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (unnumbered document, distributed in the meeting) (agenda item 14)

13. Ms. TUDAKOVIC (Rapporteur) thanked the Executive Committee members for the confidence shown in her by re-electing her as Rapporteur and briefly introduced the draft report of the fifty-eighth session. Sections I and II provided an overview of the fifty-eighth session and section III contained the text of the Executive Committee's conclusions and decisions. The final version of the report would be submitted to the Third Committee of the General Assembly as an addendum to the High Commissioner's annual report. She noted that the conclusion on children at risk provided guidelines identifying the components of a comprehensive child protection system designed to strengthen the protection of children at risk. Existing risk factors were identified and prevention and response measures were included. An annex to the report contained a list of the decisions taken by the Standing Committee and the summary of the general debate provided by the Chairman earlier in the week.

14. *The draft report of the Executive Committee on the work of its fifty-eighth session was adopted.*

CLOSING OF THE SESSION (agenda item 15)

REMARKS BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER AND BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

15. Mr. GUTERRES (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed the commitment and support expressed by member States during the session and, to sum up, recalled the ten commitments that would guide UNHCR action in 2008:

16. The commitment to its mandate. More than ever, UNHCR was determined to fulfil its mandate to protect and assist refugees and stateless persons and to find durable solutions to their problems.

17. The commitment to the beneficiaries. Refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons must always be at the centre of the concerns of UNHCR, which must be a humanistic rather than a technocratic organization. For that, headquarters must be able to serve the organization's actions in the field.

18. The commitment to protection. The international protection of refugees was at the centre of UNHCR action. By encouraging discussion of the asylum-migration nexus, UNHCR was not trying to become a migration management agency but wanted to be sure that the protection needs in mixed flows of population were adequately met. The international community must discuss the present trends of displacement.

19. The commitment to solutions. UNHCR wished to propose a comprehensive set of solutions, ranging from voluntary repatriation – the preferred solution – to resettlement and local integration. Protracted situations must be given priority, which did not mean that others would be forgotten or excluded.

20. The commitment to sustainable solutions. UNHCR and the international community must work to create conditions conducive to the sustainable return of refugees – in other words, to consolidate peace and democracy, encourage development and promote self-reliance so that the nightmare did not recur and the cycle of violence was not repeated.

21. The commitment to reform. The key elements of UNHCR action should be readiness, flexibility and expertise. In order for UNHCR to be efficient and cost-effective, many things needed to be changed. It was perfectly understandable that the Staff Council in Geneva should be concerned about the reform process under way. However, thanks to the continuous consultations, everything was being done to ensure a smooth transition: the voluntary separation programme was a success; after a recruitment freeze, headquarters was currently starting to fill about 40 General Service vacancies in Geneva; G to P promotion was being encouraged, as were transfers to other organizations in the United Nations system. Ultimately the number of staff separations would be small. In addition, UNHCR intended to remain a dedicated partner in the general reform of the United Nations system designed to achieve a more rational global distribution of work.

22. The commitment to results-based management. In view of the challenges that it was facing, UNHCR needed to find ways of better assessing its needs, better measuring the results obtained, strengthening transparency, improving accountability for implementation and maintaining reasonable budgets by strategizing and prioritizing.

23. The commitment to partnership. UNHCR could not act on its own. The United Nations, ICRC and the NGOs were its three main and equal allies. In accordance with the principles adopted at the Global Humanitarian Platform, strategic coordination among those institutions must be strengthened.

24. The commitment to the security and welfare of UNHCR staff. Even if it would never be possible to abolish risk, it was the duty of UNHCR to guarantee the safety of its employees. The security standards adopted were those established for the entire United Nations system following the attack in which Sergio Vieira de Mello had lost his life. Living and working conditions must also be improved: prefabricated housing was being installed in emergency situations where local infrastructure was insufficient.

25. Lastly, the commitment to dialogue and cooperation with member States. Contemporary challenges, of unprecedented complexity, must be addressed from the political as well as the humanitarian viewpoint. Only member States had that legitimacy.

26. The CHAIRMAN paid a tribute to the UNHCR staff, particularly those in the field, for their professionalism, dedication and selflessness in the service of the refugee cause. He noted with pleasure that the fifty-eighth session of the Executive Committee had been attended by 72 member States, about 50 observers, various intergovernmental

organizations and many NGOs, and that a spirit of constructive dialogue and consensus had prevailed.

27. After the customary exchange of courtesies, he declared closed the fifty-eighth session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

*The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.*