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Chair: Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria)
Later: Ms. Dagher (Vice-Chair) (Lebanon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 62: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/68/12 (Part I), A/68/12 (Part II), A/68/12/Add.1 and A/68/341)

1. **Ms. Leshkova** (Belarus) said that the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees had been incorporated into her Government's legislation and were being implemented. There were legislative instruments in place that granted refugee status and protection to foreign nationals and stateless persons, regulated their stay, the provision of monetary assistance, the refugee status application process and temporary protection matters. There was also an act on the legal status of foreign nationals and stateless persons. Her Government's legislation promoted national and cultural diversity without any ethnic, national or religious conflict; as a result there had been a consistent increase in applications for refugee status, with the number of applications increasing by 25 per cent in 2012 in comparison with 2011.

2. Belarus was actively cooperating with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and appreciated its efforts to provide Member States with technical assistance. However, UNHCR should expand its programme of activities and work more actively with donors. Her Government welcomed the July 2013 Economic and Social Council recommendation on enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of UNHCR (E/2013/L.25), aimed at expanding its membership from 87 to 94 States, including Belarus. That recommendation was a telling acknowledgement of her Government's contribution to the development of an international system that provided asylum and assistance to refugees. It was hoped that the General Assembly would adopt the corresponding draft resolution on that question.

3. The increase in the flow of illegal refugees led to the spread of crimes such as human trafficking. Belarus called on UNHCR to build its capacities to effectively deal with that issue and to engage more actively in the implementation of the United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons and in the work of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group against

Trafficking in Persons. It noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had participated as a member of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group at the fourth ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends United against Human Trafficking held during the General Assembly in September 2013.

4. **Ms. Putanapan** (Thailand) said the results of the joint efforts of UNHCR and the Executive Committee to help States improve their civil registration systems, which could lead to a reduction in statelessness, and enlarge the geographical representation of the Executive Committee, were commendable. Because the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers weighed on the economic and social development of host countries, which were mainly developing countries, Thailand called for the continued support of those countries, emphasizing the principle of burden-sharing.

5. Her Government had always sought to foster cooperation at the bilateral, regional and international levels to efficiently manage migration flows, and the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime was an example of that effort. Consultation with the relevant actors was essential to identify comprehensive solutions to irregular refugee movements in the region, and the root causes thereof, ranging from economic, social and political factors had to be addressed.

6. **Mr. Tsymbaliuk** (Ukraine) said that his delegation commended the various activities of UNHCR and emphasized the importance of providing it with adequate resources. The structural and administrative reform of the Office would increase its efficacy and ensure the transparent use of financial resources. His Government was ready to cooperate further with UNHCR to address current challenges and provide assistance to immigrants and refugees who sought asylum in Ukraine. In that regard, he noted with appreciation that the renovation of the temporary holding facility for refugees in Odessa had been successfully completed within the framework of the European Union-funded Regional Protection Programmes. In a relatively short period, Ukraine had built a national asylum system in conformity with international and European standards.

7. His country had adopted laws that provided additional or temporary protection to refugees and regulated refugee access to social services, education

and health care. A strategy to integrate refugees and persons in need of additional protection into Ukrainian society had also been implemented. The Government was taking the appropriate legislative measures to protect refugees in accordance with the Action Plan on Visa Liberalization as part of the process of adapting Ukrainian legislation to European Union standards. The implementation of agreed legislative measures had, within the context of dialogue with the European Union, been positively assessed. Ukraine, therefore, had a regulatory framework for the sustainable development of its national asylum system.

8. **Ms. Alsaleh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her country had spent decades welcoming millions of refugees who had fled acts of aggression that it had had no hand in. Presently facing a humanitarian crisis, her Government was cooperating with humanitarian organizations in order to address the plight of internally displaced Syrians fleeing both the criminal acts of armed terrorist groups supported and financed from abroad and the brutal impact of illegal unilateral measures imposed on her country by the European Union and the United States of America.

9. The Syrian Arab Republic was committed to cooperating with the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people throughout the country, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the humanitarian response plan agreed to by the Syrian Government, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNHCR. Despite that agreement, financing shortfalls would remain the chief obstacle to implementing response plans, with pledges coming in at under 60 per cent of the projected need.

10. Her delegation expressed grave concern about the deteriorating security, social, health and economic situation in the Syrian refugee camps abroad, which had been transformed into terrorist training camps from which terrorists were sent into the Syrian Arab Republic to carry out massacres. The UNHCR report had highlighted the rise in organized crime, rape, child labour, prostitution and child marriage. UNHCR and the host Governments must therefore take immediate action to raise awareness and protect Syrians against those dangers. With regard to information on the number of Syrian refugees and migrants in neighbouring countries, the Syrian Government was working to rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by the armed terrorist groups and cleanse the region of

terrorists in order to enable its inhabitants to reclaim their lives, lives that the Syrian State had always kept safe.

11. Syrians had begun to return home gradually, especially those who had left for neighbouring countries, according to the UNHCR report (A/68/12 Part II). Her delegation regretted that some Governments and international organizations were exaggerating the issue of counting Syrian refugees on Syrian soil in order to beg for financial assistance and also the attempt by some Governments to bar Syrian nationals from returning home by confiscating their identity documents. Their intention was to manipulate the Syrian refugee tragedy to defame the image of the Syrian people and their nation.

12. Those who truly wished to assist Syrian refugees should do so by helping them return to their homes instead of attempting to make permanent their refugee situation and selecting specific groups for settlement in other countries, based on their religious or ethnic identity. Such measures posed a major threat to the religious and ethnic diversity for which her country had been known and served the purposes of the takfirist terrorist groups that were attempting to turn the secular Syrian Arab Republic into a Taliban-style emirate in which all human rights were violated.

13. **Mr. Masood Khan** (Pakistan) said that, although new refugee situations demanded more immediate attention, protracted refugee situations should not be ignored or considered the exclusive responsibility of host countries. Pakistan, a long-standing partner of UNHCR in the provision of humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected areas and host to some three million Afghan refugees, had been cooperating with the Office to ensure the safety and access to all basic amenities, education and means of communication of all refugees.

14. Despite dwindling financial and material support from the international community, Pakistan continued to host Afghan refugees; however, it could not do so indefinitely. That was a unique refugee situation, which entailed serious long-term socio-economic, political and ecological consequences. The voluntary repatriation of the refugees seemed to be the only feasible option. Pakistan supported Afghanistan's efforts to create the conditions of stability conducive to refugee return, repatriation and assimilation. The Government of Afghanistan should address the issue of refugees living in Pakistan and take effective steps to

prevent a new influx of refugees post-2014, which Pakistan would not be able to absorb.

15. The billions of dollars that had recently been pledged at a variety of conferences in support of the reconstruction of Afghanistan should also promote repatriation and refugee return. The time had come to resolve the refugee issue once and for all. Pakistan, therefore, called on the international community and UNHCR to take serious steps to create an environment conducive to the return and permanent resettlement of Afghan refugees. Such would ensure their participation in the rebuilding of their country, and the political stabilization of Afghanistan and the entire region.

16. **Mr. Otaka** (Japan) said that his country was deeply concerned at the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IPDs) in the world and paid tribute to the dedicated work carried out by UNHCR in that regard. He commended those countries which, despite the influx of Syrian refugees, continued to maintain an open-border policy and respect the principle of non-refoulement. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to grow ever more serious. UNHCR had made that crisis a top priority and was delivering assistance under extreme circumstances.

17. His Government would continue to work with the international community to assist refugees and their host countries. The Japanese Prime Minister had announced that a further \$60 million in humanitarian assistance, in addition to the \$95 million already contributed, would be provided for refugees and internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the surrounding region. Japan also provided support for the stabilization of neighbouring countries there, which included \$120 million in loans to Jordan.

18. With regard to the UNHCR Age, Gender, and Diversity (AGD) approach, Japan would make efforts to ensure that women participated at all stages, including in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, and the safeguarding of their rights and physical well-being. Over \$3 billion in official development assistance would be provided for those aims. His country looked forward to working with UNHCR on that issue. In general, Japan attached great importance to human security and peacebuilding, which were essential pillars of its diplomatic policy.

19. Of the two visits effected by the High Commissioner to Japan that year, his presence at and

contribution to the discussions of the Fifth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) were of particular importance. That contribution had made it possible to reaffirm a direct link between regional peace and security, on the one hand, and the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, on the other, as well as the crucial role that they played in African development.

20. *Ms. Dagher (Lebanon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

21. **Mr. Loulichki** (Morocco) said that international solidarity was necessary to respond to humanitarian emergencies. Morocco had sent emergency assistance to persons displaced by the crises in Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Sahel, and his Government welcomed the voluntary repatriation of over half a million refugees, which had been facilitated by UNHCR. It also welcomed the efforts of UNHCR and its partners to improve the living conditions of refugees and internally displaced persons and to find sustainable solutions for those desirous of returning to their country of origin, thereby creating conditions that were conducive to the swift and voluntary repatriation of refugees. UNHCR should pay particular attention to restrictions on freedom of movement and the detention of refugees in deplorable conditions. States that hosted refugees had the legal, moral and human responsibility to protect their rights and shield them from the potential security threats posed by criminal and terrorist groups active in some refugee camps.

22. Morocco welcomed the adoption by the UNHCR Executive Committee of the conclusion on civil registration ([A/AC.96/1132](#)), which would guarantee that refugees had equitable access to social services. The provision of UNHCR assistance and humanitarian aid should be based on verified, controllable data. His Government's requests that UNHCR bring an end to the deplorable conditions in the Tindouf camps in Algeria were based on that principle. Algeria's refusal to meet its international obligations, in particular its failure to respond to calls by the Secretary-General and the Security Council to conduct a census and registration of the refugees in the Tindouf camps, constituted a violation of its obligations under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and an affront to UNHCR, the United Nations and the international community. He urged unconditional compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law with respect to the

Tindouf camps. Morocco welcomed the impartial efforts of UNHCR and the United Nations World Food Programme to assist the refugees in those camps and implement confidence-building measures. His Government's work with UNHCR was backed by its annual voluntary contribution of \$1 million.

23. **Mr. Tanin** (Afghanistan) said that Afghanistan had more nationals living outside its borders as refugees than any other country. His Government had partnered with UNHCR to facilitate the return of refugees. Six million had returned since 2002, 4.6 million of them voluntarily, and over 100,000 landless families had been granted plots of lands by presidential decree. The support of the international community was essential for voluntary refugee return and reintegration. His Government welcomed the outcome of the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries, which had taken place in Geneva in May 2012, and underscored the importance of fulfilling the obligations of international refugee law with respect to the protection of refugees.

24. Many returning Afghans still needed land, shelter and potable water and lacked access to health care and education. Addressing those needs would require long-term social and economic development programmes and capacity-building programmes, which depended heavily on international donor support. The hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons would also require continued support from the Government and the international community. Improved security and stability would offer more incentive for returning refugees, and long-term efforts toward peace, security and stability would further enable sustainable resettlement.

25. He expressed his Government's appreciation to those countries that continued to host Afghan refugees, in particular Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In shouldering that enormous burden, they had demonstrated their solidarity with their Afghan neighbours. Afghanistan welcomed the decision of the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue hosting Afghan refugees for another year and also appreciated the tireless efforts of UNHCR, which had facilitated the repatriation of nearly 100,000 nationals in 2012 and had been deeply involved in other projects for the country's most vulnerable refugees.

26. **Mr. Šćepanović** (Montenegro), while commending UNHCR on its efforts, said that more comprehensive efforts were required to address the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons, in particular women and children. Joint efforts, burden-sharing and a sense of partnership across all levels were necessary to produce tangible and sustainable results. Montenegro had hosted refugees and displaced persons from the region of former Yugoslavia for the past two decades and had sought to secure sustainable solutions to the inherent challenges of the protracted situation by developing a solid legislative framework and adopting a number of strategic documents. His Government's approach was underpinned by the principles of integration into society and voluntary repatriation.

27. Montenegro had also engaged in bilateral cooperation with countries of origin and other international partners to implement the Regional Housing Programme, which envisaged sustainable housing solutions for displaced and internally displaced persons from the former Yugoslavia. Collective centres would be closed permanently, and residential units would soon be constructed in Konik, Montenegro's largest refugee camp. Efforts were also being made to improve the socio-economic status of refugees and displaced persons, with special emphasis placed on the education of the children of internally displaced persons from the Roma and Egyptian populations.

28. There was a law providing for the regulation of legal status of displaced and internally displaced persons. In view of the heavy socio-economic burden posed by the large numbers of refugees, there were awareness-raising efforts with regard to the voluntary return of refugees to their countries of origin. In that regard, he underscored the need for more active collaboration with the countries of origin to create conditions for their safe return. An active policy on asylum and migration was also under way, and a centre for accommodating asylum seekers would be opened. In accordance with European Union principles, the centre would create the conditions necessary for full application of international standards in that area.

29. There should be a more effective mechanism of coordination between United Nations agencies and recipient countries that focused on providing assistance to both refugees and the host countries. His Government remained dedicated to successfully implementing all national and international initiatives

and instruments, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and was in the final phase of preparations to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Lastly, he expressed support for the draft resolution on UNHCR, which his delegation usually sponsored.

30. **Mr. Sarki** (Nigeria) said that his delegation wished to thank UNHCR for its activities in Africa, the Middle East and the rest of the world. Its work could not proceed unhindered without the support of the international community, in particular the donor States. Having hosted refugees in the past, his Government knew that host States often sacrificed their own security to keep their borders open. For the past two years, his Government had been fighting the Boko Haram terrorist group, and had used substantial resources to restore peace and stability and prevent displacement. Though those efforts had been successful to a certain degree, Nigeria would require the continued understanding and support of the international community to defeat terrorism. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Africa posed a grave threat to peace and security in the region. He, therefore, called on the international community to halt the illicit transfer of arms to Africa and to adhere strictly to the recently adopted Arms Trade Treaty.

31. Voluntary repatriation, integration and resettlement were three sustainable options to solve refugee-related issues and were anchored by UNHCR instruments. The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness provided a foundation for collective action. Accordingly, Nigeria called on States to maximize the use of those instruments to address the mounting problems of refugees worldwide.

32. **Mr. Mwinyi** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation took note of the recommended institutional reforms for more effective delivery of assistance to refugees and noted with concern the rise in the number of refugees in Africa, which held one quarter of the global refugee population owing to the eruption of violence in areas including the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic, and to the ongoing conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States in the Sudan. Nevertheless, some parts of Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes Region, had experienced relative stability over the last decade. That warranted

sustainable voluntary repatriation: where conditions improved and circumstances permitted, refugees should be encouraged to return to their countries of origin.

33. The United Republic of Tanzania hosted refugees mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi. In that respect, his Government appreciated the overall support from the international donor community towards finding a lasting solution to the protracted situation involving some 35,000 Burundian refugees who had been living in exile in his country for almost two decades. The successful, orderly and safe return of those refugees, in line with international norms and standards, and the closure of the Mtabila refugee camp in 2012 in particular had been a milestone achievement for the international community, helping to build on lessons learned on humanitarian interventions, especially vis-à-vis orderly returns.

34. As an example of his country's longstanding reflection of African hospitality towards refugees, the Government had decided in 2010 to naturalize more than 162,000 Burundian refugees who had lived in the country since 1972. Although the naturalization process had been suspended, his country was determined to resolve the 1972 caseload issue in the most transparent way. Although that process might seem prolonged, it was crucial to safeguard the interests of those involved and include all relevant stakeholders in decision-making, in order to ensure a socially desirable and implementable outcome.

35. With regard to the Somali refugee problem, repeatedly referred to by the High Commissioner for Refugees over the years, he noted that his Government was in the final stage of concluding the naturalization and integration of all Somali refugees who had applied for citizenship. The Government remained committed to keeping its doors open to genuine asylum seekers and refugees and would continue to engage the international donor community in seeking lasting solutions for refugees.

36. **Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) said that, although challenges persisted, the High Commissioner for Refugees and his Office had played a vital role in addressing the problem of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) around the world over the past years. His delegation appreciated their support and cooperation in helping with the implications of the

crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic in particular. The deteriorating situation there had resulted in millions of internally displaced persons and refugees in that country and neighbouring ones: Egypt was currently hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, as well as over a million Sudanese and Palestinian refugees. It had addressed the consequences of the crisis and provided care and assistance to those refugees in Egypt, in cooperation with the UNHCR and other relevant United Nations and other international agencies. Support from the international community was needed to help further strengthen the efforts of host countries.

37. A holistic approach should be adopted in dealing with the situation in the Sahel region in order to mitigate other drivers of displacement and potential sources of conflict, including food insecurity, widespread poverty, drought and desertification due to climate change. In that respect, the UNHCR required sustainable resources to help it to carry out its mandate and pay particular attention to the protracted refugee situations in a number of developing countries.

38. Efforts to eliminate the inherent causes of conflicts in the world must be stepped up: the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission must work together to support and enhance the capacities of post-conflict States to achieve sustainable development, restore security and ensure respect for human rights, all prerequisites for creating an enabling environment for the return of refugees and mitigating the impact of the refugee crisis in regions suffering from conflict situations. Lastly, he stressed in that regard that respect for international human rights and humanitarian law was essential, as was giving due consideration to the legitimate national security concerns in hosting countries.

39. **Mr. Medan** (Croatia) said that his delegation fully endorsed UNHCR operational and policy choices and its efforts to identify the most effective responses to the challenges that it had faced over the past year. That Office's involvement in facilitating durable solutions in South-East Europe, and in particular its engagement in the Regional Housing Programme was in line with its own goal to ensure a sustainable, just and comprehensive resolution to the refugee situation in that region. As both a regional partner and new member of the European Union, Croatia remained committed to the Programme, as its effective

implementation was the best guarantee to resolving the displacement problem in the region.

40. Croatian society had undergone profound changes in the last 20 years, having achieved the highest standards of protecting human and minority rights, including in the framework of the European Union. Ensuring the return of refugees and securing comprehensive and durable solutions were an important part of that process.

41. His delegation welcomed the discussion initiated by UNHCR on the invocation of a cessation clause for Croatia, as the time had come to look into the appropriate provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. His Government stood ready to participate in all consultations and other activities in that regard. It fully supported the High Commissioner's role in that process, since his involvement would guarantee the full respect and utmost care for each individual refugee in that context. It was hoped that a clear timeline could be set for the implementation of that process, as a timely outcome would be a rare joint success story in the context of increasing global displacement.

42. **Mr. Makharoblishvili** (Georgia) said that his Government had fully assumed its responsibility of providing durable solutions to those affected by displacement, including refugees, stateless persons and asylum seekers residing in Georgia, and was fully committed to guaranteeing their socio-economic rights. For example, it had undertaken significant steps align its legislation and policies with relevant international standards in order to safeguard the rights of stateless persons, refugees and internally displaced persons; it had ratified the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and had adopted a new law on refugees and humanitarian status. With support from UNHCR and other partners, it had been able to ensure maximal integration of the displaced population into Georgian society, having granted about 600 refugees Georgian citizenship since 2009. It had also opened a centre for asylum seekers in 2010, for whom it had developed health care services and had implemented many educational projects. Also, displaced children were being integrated into the regular education system.

43. Nevertheless, forced displacement continued to be one of the most alarming issues in the country, owing to the ethnic cleansing, expulsion and human

rights abuses that its population had suffered in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in the early 1990s and again in 2008. Despite the international community's concerted efforts, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons continued to be deprived of their internationally recognized right to a safe and dignified return. Moreover, the installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial obstacles along the occupation line in those regions was exacerbating the situation. That affected the livelihoods and fundamental freedoms of the local population and had resulted in a humanitarian crisis. His Government stood ready to provide internally displaced persons with a durable housing solution and address their immediate needs, without prejudice to their right to a safe and dignified return to their places of permanent residence, the only durable solution.

44. The Office of the High Commissioner had made invaluable efforts within the context of the international discussions in Geneva. Nevertheless, Georgia's counterpart continued to disregard the applicability of internationally recognized principles, thus preventing the achievement of tangible results on the issue. Those discussions were thus key for addressing outstanding humanitarian issues. It was hoped that UNHCR would continue to provide support in helping to address the existing humanitarian problems. Georgia, for its part, would continue to cooperate with the Office and to seek new approaches in dealing with the matter.

45. **Mr. Patriota** (Brazil) said that the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic was cause for great indignation. His country was particularly sensitive to that dramatic crisis since so many persons of Syrian and Lebanese origin had contributed to the forging of Brazil's identity as a nation. His Government had been cooperating with UNHCR in its humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict since the end of 2012, and had contributed approximately \$1 million towards assistance to refugees in countries neighbouring the Syrian Arab Republic. The principles of international solidarity and burden-sharing should apply: refugees from the conflict should be able to seek refuge in countries outside the Syrian Arab Republic's immediate vicinity. In that context, Brazil's National Committee for Refugees had recently authorized the processing of Brazilian visas for Syrian refugees wishing to apply for refuge in Brazil. That

Committee's procedural mechanisms would be made more efficient thanks to a cooperation agreement recently signed by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice.

46. His delegation commended the efforts of neighbouring countries — Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, in particular — for their generosity in hosting so many Syrian refugees, as the international community needed to strengthen its support and assistance to refugees from the Syrian conflict and to the countries and communities hosting them. Ending those refugees' plight required a negotiated political settlement to the Syrian conflict rather than a military solution; Brazil was committed to diplomacy and negotiation in that respect. As the Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic had noted, unilateral sanctions were exacerbating the humanitarian situation. The invasion of Iraq ten years earlier had caused the displacement of approximately five million people, according to the UNHCR. Moreover, refugee traffic out of the country had increased since the intensification of the Syrian civil war, and the costs of war were continuing to increase.

47. As Israel and Palestine reengaged in direct negotiations, Palestinians must be given assistance to help meet their substantial humanitarian needs. In that respect, his Government continued to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and had recently concluded an agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP) for the donation of more than 11 thousand tons of food to the Agency. The most serious refugee situation in South America was the decades-long conflict in Colombia, with Ecuador having hosted the greatest number of displaced persons in the region. It was hoped that the current negotiations between the Colombian authorities and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) would put an end to the conflict and further enhance the status of South America as a continent of peace and cooperation.

48. He commended the High Commissioner for the spending cuts made in headquarters staffing and its outsourcing of services to implementing partners in the field, while acknowledging the dedicated work of its staff in assisting refugees the world over. He also welcomed UNHCR efforts to increase its capacity for ensuring nutrition and food security of refugees through joint collaboration with WFP and commended

it for giving priority to locally purchased food in its operations. Brazil had helped to fund UNHCR pilot projects that were geared towards implementing local procurement schemes in the Sudan, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Pakistan, as part of durable solutions for rebuilding lives. He encouraged UNHCR to mainstream nutrition and food security of refugees as a regular component of its planning and programming cycle, as the Office could play a key role in helping the United Nations to meet the Secretary-General's "Zero Hunger Challenge".

49. **Mr. Singh** (India) said that it was important to gain a better understanding of the root causes for the growing number of persons fleeing their countries of origin and hosted mainly by developing countries, which jeopardized those countries' already delicate economies. That would help in formulating more comprehensive policies for the early return and reintegration of refugees into their home countries. On the issue of protracted refugee situations, the most durable solution was to create conditions for voluntary repatriation. While political complexities limited the implementation of voluntary return, bilateral and regional dialogue among the countries involved was necessary to reassure refugees of their safe and stable return home. In that respect, developing countries of origin should be provided with assistance to create economic opportunities for returning refugees.

50. Since it was the primary responsibility of States to deal with internal displacement, UNHCR involvement could only complement national efforts and must be with the concurrence of the national authorities. The Office's involvement, furthermore, should take due consideration of its mandate, modality of intervention, availability of resources and careful examination of all implications before mainstreaming its activities. Discourse on migrants should be distinct from that on refugees. In that respect, international migration must be promoted in a non-discriminatory and orderly manner, recognizing that migrants added economic value in the States of origin and destination. UNHCR therefore must develop capacities to maintain a clear distinction between refugees and economic migrants in order to better protect the needs of refugees.

51. It was hoped that UNHCR would implement various recommendations from the report of the Independent Audit and Oversight Committee, and bring any constraints in implementing them to the members'

attention. India continued to host a large number of refugees, and its refugee programmes were managed entirely from its own resources. It had clearly demonstrated its commitment to the principles of protection and non-refoulement. The decision to grant all UNHCR-mandate refugees in urban areas the opportunity to apply for long-stay visas, which allowed refugees to work in the private sector and enrol in any academic institution, augmented the protection provided to them. India was continuing to refine its administrative mechanisms for providing greater hospitality to refugees during their stay there.

52. **Mr. Bonamy** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that major political efforts were needed to collectively prevent and resolve conflicts worldwide and to reduce the impact of conflicts on civilians. Through its assistance to vulnerable communities and its protection activities, ICRC, together with other humanitarian organizations, could help to limit the scope of displacement. It had provided assistance to some 4.4 million displaced persons in the world, and it would continue to support those persons as well as their host communities and other vulnerable groups. In that respect, it was key to recognize and preserve Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies' capacity to conduct impartial humanitarian activities, since they were the most familiar with the respective national contexts and had access to places that other humanitarian entities, especially international ones, lacked.

53. Since internally displaced persons faced different realities, it was important to adapt the humanitarian response to the different problems that they faced. The ICRC strategy focused on helping the most vulnerable, particularly in the emergency phase, but also in other phases of displacement, when humanitarian needs were not met. Besides giving humanitarian assistance, such as providing essential goods, reuniting families, and giving care and support to victims of sexual violence, ICRC had also started to adopt a more systematic approach for rapid recovery and resilience in dealing with conflict. It also provided development agencies and national authorities with information on its activities and asked for their input so that they could make independent decisions on the best strategies to adopt.

54. ICRC requested development organizations and Government entities, which were best placed to deal with the issue of prolonged displacement, to act

promptly rather than wait until conflicts ended. Displaced persons must enjoy the same rights as other citizens in benefiting from development projects and social security schemes. Durable solutions to displacement must be found, and resettlement or return ensured, inter alia by ensuring safety guarantees, assistance with transport or the restitution of property.

55. National legislation and policies and institutional capacity-building could substantially improve the fate of displaced persons. ICRC welcomed the ratification by some States of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa and encouraged other members of the African Union to follow suit. In that respect, it stood ready to help interested Governments with the ratification process, the review of their national legislation and help facilitate dialogue.

56. **Mr. Benmehidi** (Algeria) said that his delegation was concerned about the increase in the number of refugees through the end of 2012, with Africa hosting a quarter of the world's refugees, as well as the rise in the number of internally displaced persons. Those upward trends demonstrated the urgent need to take action to resolve the increasingly alarming situation, especially for Africa. It was also concerned about the urgent situations in the Sahel region, Central Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and Mali, which had more than 300,000 internally displaced persons, and more than 100,000 persons had sought refuge in neighbouring countries including Algeria.

57. The international community's help was required to meet humanitarian assistance needs in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries. The relevant rules in that regard should be respected, which required joint efforts by both the host and donor countries to address the protracted refugee situations, preferably through measures to ensure their self-reliance. Particular emphasis should be placed on the sacred right of return and the need for durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons, using a development-driven approach focused on resolving the root causes of those situations.

58. In Tindouf, Algeria continued to host refugees from the non-self-governing territory of Western Sahara, who were awaiting voluntary repatriation once a just and durable solution that recognized their right to self-determination would be in place, as reaffirmed in relevant United Nations resolutions. His country had

had confidence-building measures in place since 2004 to reunite refugees in the Tindouf camps with family members living in Western Sahara; 20,000 persons had participated in that family visit programme. Algeria welcomed in particular the UNHCR/WFP joint assessment missions together with donors, the outcomes of which confirmed the transparency in the international assistance distribution operations for Western Saharan refugees.

59. His Government would spare no effort to provide support to those refugees and called on donors to continue their support to UNHCR in that regard, as those refugees were fully dependent on international assistance. Algeria had also hosted refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya, Central Africa, and the Sahel and was providing emergency humanitarian assistance to some countries in the Horn of Africa and in the Sahel and to internally displaced persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and to Syrian refugees in Jordan.

60. **Mr. Dehghani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country continued to host one of the largest refugee populations in the world and was actively engaged with UNHCR. His Government had continuously improved the health status of the refugees within its borders, of whom at least 80 per cent benefited from health insurance covering secondary and tertiary treatment. Education was provided for both children and adult refugees; currently, more than 300,000 Afghan students attended school in his country and 8,000 were university students. The Iranian Government had helped to improve refugees' self-reliance and livelihoods in the country, namely through access to self-employment and small-business opportunities, in spite of the unilateral economic and financial pressures and sanctions imposed upon it by some States.

61. The international community should do more to address the lack of facilities for refugees' local integration and improve conditions for the return of Afghan refugees who continued to live in host countries, including his own, where assistance provided to returnees was very low compared with relevant costs. His Government had always supported refugees' inalienable right to voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity. In that respect, it favoured resettlement, noting that only about 1,200 Afghan refugees had been able to leave the Islamic Republic of Iran within the framework of resettlement in 2012. Since 1999, the total number of resettlement cases was

only 12,000 individuals whereas the average birth rate of refugees in the country was 40,000 annually.

62. The outcome of the International Conference on the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries, which had taken place in May 2012 in Geneva, should be implemented, as that would help solve the plight of refugees and to alleviate the economic and social burden on host countries. The international community should seize the opportunity before it to meet the reasonable needs of repatriated refugees in Afghanistan and provide the necessary funds to enhance voluntary repatriation and help Afghan refugees and displaced persons to realize their dream of returning home. The international community should also allocate adequate funds to help develop educational and health facilities and equipment for Afghan refugees in his country. The international system must be enhanced and made more supportive and constructive in its engagement to improve the situation of the millions of refugees, particularly Afghani refugees, in host countries.

63. **Mr. Desta** (Eritrea) said that his Government, a signatory to the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa but not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, did observe the principles contained therein and upheld the safety of refugees. Nevertheless, the issue of refugees was customarily exploited; certain refugee camps had become centres for political recruitment, and the lack of accountability in refugee camp management had allowed camp administrators to enrich themselves by diverting resources allocated to refugees. The mistreatment of refugees in some camps put their safety at risk.

64. Eritrea maintained a policy of voluntary repatriation of its nationals and opposed forced repatriation, expulsion or persecution of repatriated Eritreans. To his dismay, some humanitarian workers were distorting the image of his country by declaring that returnees could be subjected to imprisonment or torture. A thorough vetting of persons seeking refugee status in order to determine the reasons for their migration was a prerequisite for a long-term resolution of their status, whether it involved repatriation or reintegration.

65. The barbaric crime of human trafficking was the latest in a long series of attempts to drain Eritrea of its human resources, destroy its economy and impoverish its people. Collaboration between countries of origin, transit and destination was vital to combat that heinous crime. Eritrea was coordinating its actions with Egypt, the Sudan and other countries, alongside domestic efforts, in order to prevent the crime and mitigate its impact on victims.

66. **Mr. Milanović** (Serbia) said that his country, as the home to the greatest number of internally displaced persons in Europe, was strongly committed to finding lasting solutions to the problem of protracted displacement in the region. The process of local integration had led to a drastic reduction in the number of IDPs living in Serbia. However, sustainable long-term solutions would require the political will of all actors, especially the countries of origin. One of the preconditions for sustainable return was full respect for the rights of national minorities in the countries of origin, including their right to use their language and script and efficient implementation of laws at the local level.

67. A regional approach was best suited to address the problem of refugees in the territory of the former Yugoslavia; in that context, the 2005 Declaration of the Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns had been revitalized in 2010 at the Belgrade Regional Ministerial Conference. At the Review Ministerial Conference held in Belgrade in 2011, the Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia had signed a joint declaration on ending displacement and providing lasting solutions for the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs from the 1991-1995 period, including the Regional Housing Programme. Half of the funds needed to implement the Programme had been raised at the donors' conference in Sarajevo in 2012. He thanked the donor countries and called on the international community to provide the remaining funds to launch and implement the Programme within the next five years.

68. Solving the long-standing problem of refugees in the region was a process that called for full respect of refugees' rights and needs and could not be achieved through such administrative measures as arbitrary deadlines. Serbia was ready to continue contributing to finding a sustainable solution within a regional process and in bilateral cooperation with partner countries.

69. Notwithstanding the 14 years of international presence in Kosovo and Metohija, not even elementary conditions were in place for the return of IDPs, in terms of security and the basic needs of daily life. Returnees were few in number and faced numerous problems, including the unlawful occupation of land and physical attacks. Around 12,000 IDPs had returned to Kosovo and Metohija since 1999, and only a third had achieved a sustainable return. The inhospitable conditions had also affected Serbian turnout at the recent provincial elections.

70. Despite his Government's efforts to ameliorate the predicament of protracted internal displacement, Serbia could not influence conditions that had been created by the presence in Kosovo and Metohija of international forces and the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government. As long as the serious impediments to their return to Kosovo and Metohija persisted, IDPs would not be able to make a free decision to return or to integrate, the precondition for a lasting solution.

71. As Serbian citizens, the IDPs had the same rights and obligations under the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Serbia and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. A national strategy for solving the question of refugees and IDPs for the period 2011-2014 provided for improvements to the housing conditions of the most vulnerable IDPs. In order to assist the nearly 100,000 IDPs in need living in Serbia, his Government had been considering the possibility of initiating an assistance programme in cooperation with UNHCR, along the model of the Regional Housing Programme; Serbia would require international assistance to do so.

72. **Mr. Fiallo** (Ecuador) said that the rights to asylum and to refugee status had been enshrined in his country's Constitution since 2008. Asylum seekers and refugees were thus able to exercise their full range of rights. Moreover, Ecuador respected and abided by the principle of non-refoulement and provided emergency humanitarian and legal assistance. Persons seeking asylum or refugee status did not have criminal penalties imposed on them for entering or remaining in the country illegally. Arbitrary displacement was prohibited under the Constitution, and displaced persons had the right to receive protection and humanitarian assistance from the authorities, ensuring their access to food, lodging, housing and medical and sanitation services.

73. Preferential and specialized assistance was given to children, adolescents, pregnant women, women with underage children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. All displaced persons had the right to return to their place of origin voluntarily, safely and with dignity. Ecuador would continue working to protect refugees, attend to their needs and promote their social inclusion, goals contained in its national development plan for the years 2013 to 2017. Its long tradition of welcoming refugees dated back to the 1970s, when tens of thousands of fellow Latin Americans had been forced into displacement by military dictatorships. His country had had the highest number of persons seeking asylum and refugee status in the region for several years running, and it had granted refugee status to citizens of over 70 countries as of 2013.

74. In order to meet growing demand for refuge and asylum in Ecuador, the Directorate for Refugees delivered such services as document renewal to refugees on location and trained its own staff and national police, armed forces and other branches of the authorities on promoting and protecting the rights of the refugee population, international refugee law, international humanitarian law, due process, administrative procedures and psychological assistance. Refugees in Ecuador were not confined to camps, and they enjoyed the same rights and entitlements to free health care and education and had the same obligations as nationals.

75. His Government had invested over \$60 million a year to attend to the needs of the refugee and asylum-seeking populations. International cooperation in that regard amounted to barely \$15 million annually, hence its concern about the reduction in UNHCR budgets. The vast majority of urban refugees had found peace and stability in Ecuador and had no intention of returning to their countries of origin. Stressing the need for the international community to abide by the principle of shared responsibility, his delegation reiterated its commitment to continue supporting UNHCR.

76. **Mr. Tesfay** (Ethiopia) said that his country was deeply concerned at the growing number of refugees around the world, in particular in Africa and in his own subregion. Ethiopia had maintained an open-door policy to asylum seekers, despite the adverse consequences for the environment and security. There were currently 515,000 refugees in Ethiopia, putting

constraints on resources and requiring greater cooperation with UNHCR and the donor community.

77. On the basis of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its Protocol and the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the Ethiopian Parliament had established a legislative framework to administer the situation of refugees and returnees. Ethiopia cooperated closely with UNHCR, the donor community and other humanitarian organizations to facilitate repatriation and reintegration, meet refugees' needs, ensure a smooth relationship between refugees and host communities, administer camps and maintain law and order.

78. With a view to seeking a long-term solution, the Ethiopian Government, in cooperation with UNHCR, had launched a programme to enable refugees without a criminal record to live anywhere in the country and receive higher education. That year, a good number of refugees had earned university degrees in different areas of study and, along with the skills, training opportunities and income-generating activities offered to them, their secondary movement to other countries had declined as a result. Disasters had made the Horn of Africa one of the most conflict-ridden and volatile regions in the world, resulting in a constant influx of refugees and displaced persons over several decades.

79. Ethiopia remained committed to continue to discharge its obligations with regard to refugees and provide asylum seekers with assistance for as long as necessary. His Government therefore called on UNHCR and other partners to provide Ethiopia with adequate resources to ensure that refugees and displaced persons received the social benefits that they deserved.

80. **Mr. Kent** (United States of America) said that his Government remained a committed partner with UNHCR and its beneficiaries, contributing over \$1 billion to the agency's activities in 2013. That year had witnessed several large-scale crises, in particular the Syrian emergency, which had stretched the resources of the humanitarian community. UNHCR had risen to the occasion, but its responses must not be allowed to stretch the organization beyond its limits, as no Government or agency could meet such challenges alone.

81. Coordination among humanitarian actors was critical, as was strengthening UNHCR organizational

capacity by pursuing a human resources policy that delivered strong performance in emergency situations. Welcoming the shift in the emphasis of UNHCR on programme planning from a resource-driven approach to one based on performance and results, he stressed that UNHCR must better track and report on indicators and make objectives, standards and indicators more measurable and less subjective.

82. **Ms. Muedin** (International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that the previous month's tragic incident off the coast of Lampedusa had underlined the need for urgent action and intensified cooperation to protect asylum seekers, other migrants and vulnerable persons who were forced to undertake often dangerous land and sea journeys across the globe. UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration worked tirelessly to assist and protect the most vulnerable individuals, exercising their complementary mandates and expertise in several ways.

83. First, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's coordinated humanitarian response, the two agencies and their partners in the humanitarian community worked closely with Governments to ensure that those in need received the assistance that they required. Second, in an increasingly mobile world, IOM and UNHCR were being called upon to adapt and respond to new forms of human mobility and to work together on mixed migratory outflows, going beyond one-dimensional solutions to tackle their complex challenges of such outflows.

84. Third, IOM was committed to providing support in transitional contexts, particularly those affected by large-scale displacement and where the protection mandate of UNHCR was active in registering and caring for refugees. The role of IOM in providing technical and operational support to out-of-country voting, for instance, was complementary to the refugee agency's protection role and a fundamental component of fostering conditions for peace-building processes. Fourth, since the establishment of the two organizations in 1951, UNHCR and IOM had worked side-by-side in refugee resettlement operations, with a clear allocation of roles and responsibilities. UNHCR identified and referred refugee cases for consideration to the countries of resettlement, while IOM assisted those resettlement countries by working directly with the identified refugees in preparing and processing their transportation.

85. **Mr. Mercer** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that the Order of Malta, as the world's oldest humanitarian organization, had a long history of assisting persons who had been forced from their homes, regardless of their race, religion, class or creed. The recent trend of regionalization of crises had placed pressure on already under-resourced areas, overwhelming local support services and making capacity building for host countries a crucial component of humanitarian support. Through its humanitarian arm, Malteser International, the Order of Malta sought to empower host communities through training and infrastructure development, thereby developing their welfare capacity. The Order was providing training and employment to Turkish citizens and supporting a Syrian school in the Turkish border city of Kilis.

86. In north-eastern Thailand, Malteser International had been assisting refugees from Myanmar for three decades; its approach mirrored that of UNHCR, which placed responsibility on the hosts to provide for the displaced whilst strengthening their ability to do so. In conjunction with local partners, Malteser International was also enhancing water, hygiene and sanitation standards. Both the refugee and Thai communities were central to the design and implementation of those programmes, with the aim of helping the actors operate independently in the future.

87. Malteser International was helping to combat the recurrence of protracted refugee crises by developing the civic capacities of countries of origin. Water, sanitation and health facilities were being prepared in Kayin State, Myanmar, in order to facilitate the return of Thai-based refugees and to respond to such development challenges as infant mortality and disaster risk.

88. **Mr. Madiwale** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that his organization greatly valued its partnerships with UNHCR and other actors in working to address the needs of vulnerable refugees, displaced persons and other migrants. The partnership with UNHCR in particular had been strengthened in 2007, when the organizations signed a global operational agreement. Furthermore, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies currently represented over a quarter of all contractual partnerships in UNHCR operations; the assistance provided to Somali refugees at the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya was one such example.

89. The total number of displaced people worldwide had reached 70 million, and those in need were increasingly harder to target, as a large percentage of the displaced no longer resided in camps. Agencies and Governments must find ways to address the needs of displaced people residing outside of camps as well as those of host communities, which were placed under enormous strain by the influxes. The Syrian crisis illustrated the challenges faced by the displaced and the host communities, hence IFRC and Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian National Societies' efforts to extend assistance and support to both displaced persons and host communities in the region.

90. Across the globe, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies had worked as humanitarian auxiliaries to their Governments to assist displaced people and vulnerable migrants, as in the case of Lampedusa, the site of the previous month's horrific tragedy. Those events underscored the risks that asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants faced and the need for humanitarian actors to be afforded safe and effective access to those in need. In that connection, the recently adopted resolution on migration at the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent requested States to facilitate such access for National Societies. Reiterating his delegation's commitment to implementing the resolution, he urged States to enable effective access of humanitarian organizations to the displaced. Lastly, noting the increasing funding gaps for humanitarian assistance, he called on the international community to step up its efforts to meet the humanitarian imperative. Failure to do so would result in enormous suffering and perhaps even further displacement.

91. **Ms. Liimets** (Estonia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that her Government had been finding solutions to the situation of persons with undetermined citizenship that had remained in its territory since independence in 1991. Out of its firm belief that Governments must support people seeking citizenship, Estonia continued to encourage all persons within its territory who had not yet opted to become citizens to make a decision and to apply for Estonian citizenship. Naturalization procedures were simple, transparent and accessible, and a facilitated procedure was open to minors.

92. The percentage of persons with undetermined citizenship in Estonia had dropped from 32 per cent in

1992 to 6.5 per cent in 2013. While the common understanding of statelessness applied to persons whom no country took care of, persons of undetermined citizenship in Estonia held resident permits and travel documents and enjoyed the exercise of fundamental freedoms and rights, including equal treatment, social services and suffrage in local government elections. Moreover, they could travel to the European Union and the Russian Federation without a visa.

93. **Ms. Freimane-Deksne** (Latvia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the assertions made by the Russian Federation regarding statelessness in Latvia were unsupported by the facts. The status of the 176 stateless persons currently in Latvia was governed by the law on stateless persons. Latvia's domestic legislation was in line with the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, both of which it had ratified. Furthermore, while Latvia was not a successor State of the Soviet Union, it had granted the special privileged status of non-citizen to former Soviet citizens living in the country, ensuring their preferential access to the naturalization process.

94. Unlike stateless persons, Latvian non-citizens enjoyed the same scope of rights as Latvian citizens, and their status was governed by a special law. Latvia continued to take measures to promote the acquisition of citizenship, including by simplifying the naturalization process. In closing, she reiterated that Latvia protected the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its inhabitants regardless of their legal status.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.