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Summary record of the 632nd meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 30 September 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Dumont (Argentina)

later: Ms. Millar (Australia)

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General debate (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

General debate (agenda item 4) (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Matus** (Observer for Belarus) said that his Government was working to establish a national asylum system based on the international definition of refugee and on contemporary asylum criteria. As established in the law of 3 July 2009 on granting refugee status to foreign nationals and asylum-seekers, persons who had been granted refugee status henceforth benefited from additional protection, while other persons who could no longer be deported were issued with temporary residence permits. There were more than 3,000 asylum-seekers from 40 different countries of origin residing in Belarus in 2009. Of that total, 810 persons had been granted refugee status, and a further 83 who could not be deported had been issued with provisional residence permits for a period of up to one year. In addition, 106 refugees had been naturalized on 1 September 2009. The number of asylum-seekers had risen by 48 per cent relative to the previous year. His delegation welcomed the fruitful cooperation between its Government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in two technical cooperation projects – a project on managing migratory flows, plus a regional project on integrating refugees in Belarus, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

2. **Mr. Seilenthal** (Estonia) said that his delegation fully aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. The international community must stand ready to provide a more predictable and consistently effective response to humanitarian crises. As Estonia, together with Ireland, currently co-chaired the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, his delegation urged all donors to apply the principles of the initiative in order to make humanitarian aid more needs-based and its financing more flexible, predictable and timely. It also urged UNHCR to intensify its efforts to integrate the humanitarian reform measures adopted into all aspects of assistance and protection work, and to continue to play a constructive role in the efforts to harmonize needs assessment at the UN level. With regard to the internal reform process, the new biennial, needs-based and prioritized budget system would allow greater attention to be paid to certain important areas of protection, such as sexual and gender-based violence. His delegation regretted that to date no agreement had been reached on the Executive Committee's draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations, which concerned millions of refugees, frequently in urban settings.

3. His delegation was pleased to note that UNHCR was taking an active role in the discussions on the future common European asylum system, which would ensure a common asylum procedure and uniform status for persons granted asylum or subsidiary protection. The Office should likewise play an important part in the future European Asylum Support Office. Estonia had been continuously increasing its support for UNHCR operations since 2000. In the last two years, it had contributed to operations in Sudan, Kenya, Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2008 its contributions to UNHCR had accounted for 35 per cent of its total donations to multilateral organizations, underlining its confidence in UNHCR.

4. **Mr. Hyassat** (Jordan) wished to reiterate his country's support for UNHCR in providing assistance to refugees and other persons requiring protection. Jordan welcomed the growing collaboration between UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), since such partnerships would help States to take concrete measures and develop mechanisms at the regional and international levels to help them achieve more effective and sustainable solutions for refugees and other persons requiring protection. Over the past decades, Jordan had received multiple waves of Palestinian refugees and continued to provide a wide range of services to refugees who were still awaiting a just solution that included the right of return to their homes and appropriate compensation. Jordan had also been hosting hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens, to whom it continued to provide

public health and education services. In that regard, it hoped that the international community would be more supportive of the principle of solidarity and burden sharing in the light of the huge economic and financial burden facing Jordan, which was considerably affecting its absorption capacity.

5. **Mr. Obeidallah** (Sudan) said that the deterioration of conditions in some Sudanese refugee camps had driven many refugees to towns and cities in search of better living conditions. Some of those refugees had turned to illegal activities for which they had to be held legally responsible. Others had become involved in human trafficking and smuggling to other countries, exposing themselves to danger and in some cases putting their lives at risk. The Sudanese refugee situation would require the mobilization of considerable resources and the development of a unified legal, social and economic framework. Although the first phase of the Solution Strategy for the Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan agreed between the Government of Sudan and UNHCR in 2007 had been successfully completed, the second phase, which entailed registering refugees in towns and urban areas, had been interrupted for unknown reasons. His delegation invited UNHCR to resume that phase as soon as possible. It also renewed its appeal to UNHCR to resolve the problems that had hindered the execution of the project to identify sustainable solutions for the refugees in eastern Sudan. Due to inadequate funding, that project had so far failed to achieve its objectives.

6. Although the voluntary repatriation programme for Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries had commenced immediately after the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, persistent funding problems were obstructing the repatriation process and the reconstruction of the affected areas of Blue Nile, South Kordofan and Abyei. His delegation appealed to UNHCR and donor countries to provide the support necessary for the voluntary repatriation of Sudanese refugees. It thanked UNHCR and the international community for their efforts to find effective solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the aftermath of the war in Iraq. In that context, the Government of Sudan had agreed to receive a number of Palestinian refugees stranded at the border between Iraq and Syria. The first group was expected to arrive in Khartoum within the next few weeks. Lastly, his delegation reiterated its support for all international refugee assistance and protection mechanisms, indicating that its Government was working on a reform of the 1974 Asylum Act that would enhance the protection provided to refugees and asylum-seekers in Sudan.

7. **Ms. Nahayo** (Observer for Burundi) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the African Group. For Burundi, 2009 had brought an end to the armed conflict and a mutual undertaking on the part of the Government and the National Liberation Forces (FNL), now the FNL political party, to implement the ceasefire agreement signed on 7 September 2006. Over the past few years, as peace had gradually been restored, with support from UNHCR and the international community the Government of Burundi had managed to repatriate half a million refugees, mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania. It called on the international community to provide further assistance in addressing the new challenges arising as it endeavoured to reintegrate those returnees in a country where access to land was limited and the population density was one of the highest in Africa. The Government of Burundi acknowledged the support received from its regional and international partners in the quest for peace, and wished especially to thank the Tanzanian Government for the hospitality that it had extended towards Burundi nationals, for its patient and efficient management of the Burundi refugee problem in Tanzania, and for its decision to naturalize more than 160,000 long-term Burundi refugees.

8. More than half of the IDPs in Burundi had already returned to their place of origin, but around 100,000 remained. Returnees and IDPs who had returned to their homes

experienced exactly the same reintegration needs and the Burundi Government, in conjunction with UNHCR and its implementing partners, was working to build up its capacities in that area. However, the funding allocated to income-generating activities, particularly those envisaged within the framework of the integrated rural villages programme, had been insufficient, given that those activities were essential to effective and sustainable reintegration. Measures establishing free primary education, free health care for children under 5 and for women at childbirth, and free medical care for the most vulnerable would also help ensure conditions encouraging the return of refugees.

9. In April 2009, the Burundi Government had established the asylum management structures provided for in the national law on asylum and the protection of refugees in Burundi, adopted on 13 November 2008: the National Commission for Foreign Nationals and Refugees, the Appeals Committee, and the National Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons. Since June 2009, it had been organizing information programmes and training in the new law for the judicial and police authorities, provincial authorities, the local authorities of communes located in border provinces, civil society and the media. Those programmes placed a particular emphasis on the principle of non-refoulement and the humanitarian and apolitical nature of asylum. The Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons was responsible for registering refugees, determining their status, providing them with assistance, and ensuring their protection, specifically by issuing them with documents guaranteeing such protection. Thanks to the technical support provided by UNHCR in a pilot project, the Office now had real-time access to the UNHCR database.

10. **Mr. Pozo** (Ecuador) said that his Government was committed to providing assistance for Colombian refugees in Ecuador, despite the adverse effects of the domestic conflict in Colombia for its own country. Out of political conviction, and in accordance with its Constitution, the Government of Ecuador respected the free movement of persons, the principle of non-refoulement and the obligation to assist persons in emergencies. It believed that no human being was illegal, that asylum was intrinsically linked to the right to life and that applications for asylum should be granted whenever lives were at risk or fundamental rights under threat. The number of Colombian refugees requiring international protection on humanitarian grounds in Ecuador was estimated to be in the tens of thousands. Official statistics indicated that the number had risen from 359 in 2000 to 31,603 in 2009. The registration mechanism in place, which UNHCR had classified as exemplary, should make it possible to register the approximately 50,000 as yet unregistered “invisible” refugees in the northern border provinces before the end of June 2010. The register would provide reliable information on the number of refugees in Ecuador and their location within the country. Most importantly, however, persons needing international protection would have identity documents and would be able freely to exercise their rights and receive protection. In addition, a solidarity programme called Plan Ecuador, which aimed to improve health, education and employment conditions, as well as access to justice, would shortly be introduced in communities hosting large numbers of refugees.

11. Those initiatives would not have been possible without the cooperation of the international community. In that regard, the Government of Ecuador was particularly grateful for the substantial increase in the funds assigned to its country programme in the UNHCR programme budget for 2010–2011. The Government, for its part, allocated an annual budget of US\$ 40 million to aid for refugees and asylum-seekers despite the mounting financial and budget difficulties that the country faced as a result of the international economic crisis. While his delegation was fully prepared to consider an agreement such as that submitted by the Colombian Ambassador to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, it was imperative for Colombia to recognize the gravity of the situation and, in accordance with the principle of co-responsibility and in the spirit of

solidarity, to assume part of the enormous financial burden that that situation entailed by making a contribution proportionate to Ecuador's current unilateral effort.

12. **Mr. Feyder** (Luxembourg) said that his delegation fully aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. In the current humanitarian context, his delegation believed that it was essential for the international community to allow UNHCR the financial flexibility and predictability necessary to ensure an adequate response to the growing needs. With that aim in mind, in 2007 the Government of Luxembourg had signed a multi-year framework agreement with UNHCR that would help guarantee budget predictability and ongoing support. The delegation encouraged other member and donor States to make unearmarked contributions to UNHCR. The contribution of the Luxembourg Government had totalled 7.5 million euros in 2009, representing an increase of almost 8 per cent on its 2008 contribution.

13. His delegation was greatly concerned about the shrinking of humanitarian space and access, and in particular about the worsening security situation of humanitarian aid workers. He reiterated Luxembourg's commitment to strict observance of humanitarian principles, and recalled that there could be no effective humanitarian action without access to the people requiring assistance. Luxembourg encouraged UNHCR to continue its work to assist IDPs and, in that regard, looked forward to the forthcoming African Union Special Summit at which a convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa was due to be adopted. The Government of Luxembourg was pleased to be co-financing the Special Summit, which had been organized by the Ugandan Government.

14. His delegation drew attention to the deterioration in the humanitarian situation of the approximately 281,000 Somali refugees living in the camps in Dadaab in Kenya. That situation was attributable to the increase in the forced displacement of Somalis since 2008. Around 54,000 new refugees had arrived in Dadaab in 2009 and, according to UNHCR estimates, the total number of refugees in the Dadaab camps, which were equipped for no more than 100,000 refugees could reach 330,000 by the end of the year. He commended the Kenyan Government for the generous welcome that it had been extending to refugees within its borders since 1991 and expressed his Government's hope that the Kenyan authorities would be able to resume negotiations on the allocation of additional land to relieve the overcrowding in the Dadaab camps with UNHCR and the other parties concerned. Lastly, the Government of Luxembourg supported a common European asylum system and programmes to resettle refugees in countries of the European Union. In that regard, it had agreed to resettle 28 Iraqi refugees from Syria and Jordan in Luxembourg.

15. **Ms. Nghidinwa** (Namibia) said that her delegation wholeheartedly supported the statement made by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the African Group. She recalled that, soon after independence, Namibia had seen an influx of thousands of Angolan refugees, who had numbered 25,000 at the peak of the movement. While the majority had since returned through voluntary repatriation, 5,969 remained, along with 2,589 asylum-seekers and refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other Great Lakes countries, giving a total number of 8,558 persons. At the start of 2009, Namibia had formally recognized local integration as a durable solution and a legitimate and suitable means of addressing protracted refugee situations. As a result, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration had been mandated to work closely with UNHCR to continue promoting voluntary repatriation and to draft a policy on local integration. The focus on durable solutions for Angolan and Rwandese refugees reflected the remarkable progress that those two countries had made in recent years towards consolidating peace.

16. She would be failing in her duty if she did not mention the 2009 incident in which a small group of 41 asylum-seekers and refugees originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had illegally crossed the border between Namibia and Botswana. The members

of the group had claimed to be victims of persecution and death threats but, after investigation, the Office of UNHCR in Namibia had concluded that their allegations were unfounded.

17. **Mr. Johnson** (Observer for Liberia) said that his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the African Group. Despite the challenges facing the country after more than a decade of civil unrest, Liberia continued to provide assistance to IDPs and refugees. He expressed his country's profound gratitude to the international community, whose support was helping to secure Liberia's transformation from a failed State in a crisis to a nation in transition towards peace, stability and sustainable development. To date, 128,203 of an estimated total of 400,000 Liberian refugees who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, predominantly in West Africa, had received help in returning home through UNHCR voluntary repatriation programmes. However, nearly 65,000 registered refugees remained outside Liberia and the Liberian Government was endeavouring to secure the conditions for a dignified return for all of them. The durable solution adopted for the last remaining Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia was local integration with the support of UNHCR. His delegation appealed to UNHCR and the international community for continued support and emphasized that the delivery times for such support were essential to prevent new conflicts and the temptation for returnees once again to become refugees.

18. **Mr. Touray** (Observer for the Republic of the Gambia) said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the African Group by the representative of Zambia. The Gambia was surrounded by conflict zones and had been welcoming refugees within its borders for decades. Since the application of the cessation clause revoking their refugee status, more than 100 Sierra Leonean refugees had opted for voluntary repatriation while over 2,000 had chosen local integration in the Gambia. Those refugees had been issued with documents giving them the same rights as other citizens of the Gambia. International treaties relating to refugees had been incorporated into domestic law, paving the way for the establishment of a Gambian National Commission for Refugees which would be operational by the end of 2009. The newly-established Commission would need assistance in logistics and capacity-building, and to that end the Gambia appealed to donors and UNHCR for support.

19. **Mr. Bhattarai** (Observer for Nepal) said that his delegation commended the efforts of UNHCR in implementing reforms and enhancing efficiency. His delegation shared the High Commissioner's vision of voluntary repatriation as an effective means to achieving a durable solution for refugees, and supported the strategic role of UNHCR in their return and reintegration. Nepal had provided shelter for over 107,000 Bhutanese refugees on humanitarian grounds and, despite its limited resources, had endeavoured to ensure peace and security in the camps. The prolonged stay of such a large number of refugees had had enormous social, economic and environmental costs for the country. Regrettably, despite the Nepalese Government's continued efforts to resolve that tragic humanitarian episode through bilateral negotiations, it had not been possible to implement the agreed decisions because of a lack of cooperation from the Government of Bhutan. Given that situation, the Nepalese Government welcomed the international community's offer to organize voluntary resettlements in third countries, on the understanding that the refugees' right to return to Bhutan remained intact and open. The Nepalese Government considered resettlement to be an interim solution until the refugees were able to return to their homeland. In that regard, it appreciated the role played by the core group countries — Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and the United States of America — and thanked them for their initiatives to resettle a large number of the Bhutanese refugees. The Nepalese Government had been working closely with UNHCR, IOM and the core group countries to facilitate the voluntary resettlement of the refugees.

20. **Mr. Al Nuqari** (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that while population displacement was often due to conflict, it could also be the result of a voluntary decision to seek a better standard of living. In a global recession that was hurting the poor most of all, the international community and developed countries must do everything within their power to provide assistance for refugees and IDPs, and the best solution was to facilitate their voluntary return to their country of origin. The Syrian Arab Republic supported the reforms proposed by UNHCR, which should result in more resources to protect more people, rescue more lives and bring home more refugees in safety and dignity. In view of the scale of the task ahead, it might be useful, within the framework of the reforms, to strive to make better use of the skills and experience of partners working at the local level.

21. The global crisis was indirectly increasing migratory flows. At the time of the meeting, refugees were crossing the borders of developing countries in their hundreds of thousands. In developed countries, however, refugee numbers were far lower, almost certainly less than 100,000. In the Syrian Arab Republic, half a million people had been displaced as a result of the Israeli occupation of a significant part of Syrian territory and were receiving humanitarian assistance from UNHCR. Syria was also providing refuge to a number of Palestinians and approximately 1,300,000 Iraqis, and was working to ensure the safe, voluntary return of all those persons.

22. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that cooperation between UNHCR and Belarus had allowed for enormous progress in the development of a national system of asylum and the notion of citizenship. Belarus was located in a region where population movements were a source of numerous concerns and it was not always easy to identify protection needs in that area. The support that Belarus provided in that regard was therefore greatly appreciated by UNHCR. He also appreciated the Estonian Government's commitment to the common European asylum system and welcomed the close links forged between UNHCR and the European Asylum Support Office and its work. That cooperation would lend coherence to the European asylum system and the protection provided to refugees in Europe.

23. Working in partnership with the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR was providing considerable assistance to Iraqi refugees in Jordan, where it had received exemplary cooperation from both Governments. After welcoming successive waves of Palestinian refugees, Jordan had granted asylum to several hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees under impeccable protection conditions, in close cooperation with UNHCR and other international organizations. He welcomed Jordan's decision to actively contribute to the dialogue on urban refugees. The experience gained in Oman and Damascus and the assessments made of those experiences had been crucial to the definition of the new UNHCR strategy on urban refugees.

24. He noted the concerns expressed by the Sudanese delegation with regard to the limitations of the UNHCR programme in eastern Sudan. UNHCR was aware that the existing programme in that region was inadequate, and had ranked the Eritrean refugee situation among the five protracted refugee situations requiring priority attention. The Office was working to expand its capacity and resources in the region in order to improve the assistance provided to the Eritrean refugees. It was also working to ensure the success of the voluntary repatriation programme in south Sudan. A development programme had been successfully introduced in that region, enabling a large number of refugees to return to their homeland, where they exercised their rights and had found their place in society and in the economy. The Office was also providing assistance to urban refugee programmes in Khartoum and hoped that Sudan would contribute to the forthcoming UNHCR dialogue on that issue. With regard to the situation in Darfur, UNHCR again took the view that the crisis could not be resolved without a prior political solution. The Sudanese delegation was therefore urged to intercede with its Government in order to ensure the success of the

complex negotiations undertaken by UNHCR and the full participation of all stakeholders in UNHCR protection and assistance operations in Darfur. Lastly, he noted that the Government of Sudan had agreed to welcome Palestinian refugees and thanked it for its support in that area.

25. He congratulated Burundi on its success in negotiating peace, integrating the various movements within the political system, and repatriating refugees. That success was remarkable, given the financial and material difficulties that the country faced. The Peacebuilding Commission was very active and was cooperating effectively with the various United Nations bodies and other humanitarian actors. The Office was pleased to have played a catalytic role in the reintegration programmes by coordinating the actions of the various development and Government stakeholders in order to guarantee their success. It also wished to congratulate Burundi on its effective asylum policy and its respect for the principle of non-refoulement in an often difficult regional context.

26. Addressing the representative of Ecuador, he recalled the long-standing tradition of fruitful cooperation between UNHCR and Ecuador. The “Borders of Solidarity” programme had greatly benefited the region straddling the border between Ecuador and Colombia. The Office particularly appreciated the expanded registration policy that Ecuador had implemented in order to ensure the protection of all persons in need. Addressing the Luxembourg delegation, he expressed gratitude for the country’s contribution as the largest UNHCR donor per capita and for its support in monitoring UNHCR operations in the field. He was also grateful for the Luxembourg Government’s contribution to the development of the European asylum system. Addressing the representative of Namibia, he expressed appreciation for the great hospitality that Namibia had always shown towards refugees from various countries in the region, and particularly Angola. Namibia offered exemplary protection for refugees and accepted the principle of integration in the host country without losing sight of the fact that voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution. UNHCR was determined to find an appropriate solution to the remaining refugee-related problems.

27. Addressing the Liberian delegation, he praised the Liberian Government’s remarkable success in establishing peace and democracy and returning and reintegrating refugees. The Office was firmly committed to providing assistance to the remaining groups of Liberian refugees and would work with the Liberian Government to encourage voluntary repatriation. It appreciated the hospitality that Liberia had always shown, even during the most difficult periods in its history, and believed that the time had come to engage in constructive dialogue regarding the future application of the cessation clause, taking into account the interests of the various groups of refugees concerned, with the ultimate aim of achieving a total normalization of the situation. Addressing the Gambian delegation, he praised the country’s consistently positive attitude to the protection of refugees and confirmed that UNHCR would be ready to assist the Gambian Government in developing its asylum system. Addressing the Nepalese delegation, he was pleased that the Nepalese Government had readily agreed to establish a formal reintegration programme for a large number of refugees. He further noted that the successive Nepalese Governments with which he had worked had always been ready to come to the assistance of refugees and endeavour to find solutions. Lastly, addressing the Syrian delegation, he praised the Syrian Government’s exemplary partnership with UNHCR and the generosity that it had shown towards Iraqi and Palestinian refugees. The Office was aware of the impact of the economic crisis on countries hosting large refugee groups and appealed to the international community to show even greater generosity as a result. It also looked forward to close cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), while fully respecting the specific mandate of that agency.

28. *Ms. Millar (Australia), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

29. **Mr. Domingo** (Philippines) reported that his country had signed a Memorandum of Agreement with UNHCR and IOM that envisaged the establishment of a new emergency transit mechanism to provide a safe haven for refugees and asylum-seekers awaiting resettlement. The Government of the Philippines was also seeking out innovative forms of commitment and partnership with civil society and the private sector to provide practical support for the mechanism and for UNHCR as a whole. His delegation proposed forming a coordinating Asia-Pacific Group within UNHCR, composed of fellow Asia-Pacific delegations, as their colleagues from other regions, including Africa and the European Union, had done. It also supported the delegation of the Holy See's appeal for increased commitment to and support for refugee assistance from faith-based groups, and renewed its invitation to the other delegations to attend the Special Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation that the Philippine Government was organizing in Manila that December. The Philippine Government was pleased that UNHCR and the United Nations system as a whole were giving due emphasis to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on the situation of refugees and IDPs, but recognized that a far greater collective effort was needed to counter those effects. Faced with huge damage in the wake of Hurricane Ketsana, the Philippine Government was working closely with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with a view to launching a flash appeal.

30. **Mr. Tcharie** (Togo) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Zambia on behalf of the African Group. The Togolese Government was firmly committed to the political reconciliation process and to that end, on 29 May 2009, had established a truth, justice and reconciliation commission. The Government was also determined to continue the refugee and IDP return programme. On 3 and 11 April 2007, respectively, with a view to securing the return of Togolese refugees it had signed tripartite agreements with UNHCR and two host countries – Benin and Ghana. Since the signature of those agreements, 10,042 Togolese refugees had been repatriated with UNHCR assistance, although some 7,000 still remained in Benin and Ghana. The Togolese Government was therefore launching a fresh appeal for support in the voluntary repatriation process and, especially, in the final phase of the process of reintegrating repatriates and IDPs. There were estimated to be around 10,500 refugees currently residing in Togo, including more than 8,000 Ghanaians who had been in the north of the country since 1994. With regard to legal instruments for the protection of refugees, Togo had not yet ratified the Convention on Statelessness. However, that important instrument was currently being considered by Parliament with a view to its ratification.

31. **Mr. Lossada Torres-Quevedo** (Spain) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union. The Spanish Government continued to work to improve Spanish legislation on asylum and to strengthen the guarantees of protection provided to refugees. It was currently working to incorporate the reintegration programmes that it would be developing in conjunction with UNHCR into the new law on the right to asylum. The Spanish Government had also considerably increased its contributions to United Nations institutions and programmes, including that to UNHCR. Moreover, to strengthen its cooperation with UNHCR, it would shortly be signing a cooperation and association agreement and establishing a system that would permit more flexible funding.

32. In addressing the migratory phenomenon, the Spanish Government accorded particular importance to permanent dialogue as a means of heightening cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination. In that context, it was vitally important that the countries concerned established and applied rules that guaranteed international protection for asylum-seekers and stateless persons. It was also essential that they demonstrate responsibility, caution and pragmatism when debating the complex causes and consequences of displacements attributable to demographic or ecological factors. His

delegation reaffirmed its support for the UNHCR internal reform process. It also enthusiastically supported the UNHCR proposal regarding a new international humanitarian agreement.

33. **Ms. Riachi Assaker** (Lebanon) noted with satisfaction that the 2010–2011 budget had been drawn up on the basis of a global needs assessment and welcomed the shift to results-based management. However, the Lebanese delegation would like to see the basis for consultation enlarged to include all stakeholders in those cases where funding shortfalls made prioritization necessary. The delegation also wished to express its appreciation for UNCHR efforts to address protracted refugee situations. While acknowledging the complexity and multidimensional nature of such situations, it would nonetheless like to reaffirm the core set of principles applicable in that context. Firstly, the root causes of the problems that refugees faced had to be addressed. Secondly, conditions for their safe return had to be established. Lastly, voluntary repatriation was not just an option; it was the preferred solution, and all stakeholders had a common duty to pursue its implementation.

34. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), addressing the Philippine delegation, said that the Philippines had been a valued partner of UNHCR in the provision of protection in the Asia-Pacific region. UNHCR followed the country's activities in that region with great interest and would particularly like to thank the Government of the Philippines for its support there. It trusted that its support would be maintained, as it had plans to increase the number of initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region in the near future. Addressing the Togolese delegation, he said that UNCHR supported the voluntary repatriation programme for Togolese refugees and was pleased that Togo would soon be ratifying one, if not both, of the conventions on statelessness. Addressing the Spanish delegation, he said that UNHCR had noted the significant increase in cooperation with Spain, the increased financial aid that the Spanish Government extended to municipalities and civil society in particular, and also the high per capita contribution that the Spanish Government made to the work of UNHCR. Spain was also a model of best practice. Lastly, addressing the Lebanese delegation, for the sake of clarity he emphasized that while voluntary repatriation was the preferred solution, it was not the only one. Two further durable solutions existed – resettlement in a third country and integration in the host country, subject to the agreement of the country concerned.

35. **Mr. Paiva** (International Organization for Migration) said that the dialogue between his organization and UNHCR on the range of instances where migration and asylum met had deepened over the course of the past year. Their respective understandings, roles and capacities in various areas were being explored anew with an eye to synergy and effective response. Both organizations were conscious of their obligation to work together to find innovative ways of ensuring a timely and adequate response to the current needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable migrants throughout the world. Wherever they could, they needed to combine their efforts. That was the thinking behind, for example, the joint development of standard operating procedures for dealing with the protection needs of victims of trafficking in human beings.

36. Mixed migration flows remained a shared concern. In particular, the field-level cooperation between the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR continued through various task forces, such as the task force for migration in the Gulf of Aden, and through their respective offices around the Mediterranean. The series of migration workshops would continue, with the next one, due to take place in Costa Rica in November, focusing on the situation in the Americas. Meeting the needs of IDPs was another field in which cooperation between IOM and UNHCR continued to evolve. Over the past year, as members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and co-leads of the camp coordination and camp management clusters, IOM and UNHCR had worked increasingly closely to improve their understanding of the nexus between climate change,

environmental degradation and population movements, and to identify appropriate solutions. Lastly, after nearly six decades of working with UNHCR in the field of resettlement, IOM welcomed the new partnerships that it had forged in 2009 with UNHCR and the Governments of Romania, the Philippines and Slovakia, respectively, for the creation of three major emergency transit centres to facilitate third country resettlement and encourage countries to participate in the international burden-sharing effort.

37. **Mr. Eklu** (Economic Community of West African States), endorsing the statement made by the representative of the African Group, said that he regretted the heavy toll paid by humanitarian workers, including UNHCR personnel, in an international scenario marked by unprecedented crises – specifically global warming, the international financial crisis and insecurity. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regarded UNHCR as a highly valued partner and trusted that the two organizations would continue to work together to ensure the lasting stability indispensable to the subregion's development and integration. Receiving and reintegrating thousands of refugees and managing millions of IDPs in the aftermath of the deep crises that had shaken the subregion at the end of the 1980s had constituted a challenge that would have been insurmountable without ongoing assistance from the international community, and in particular that of UNHCR. The subregion was currently enjoying relative peace, the joint strategies that had been implemented to guarantee peace and security having borne the desired fruit.

38. The latest UNHCR/ECOWAS two-year plan had provided for a number of major initiatives, including the establishment of an emergency response team to provide ECOWAS States with an immediate assistance mechanism for citizens affected by humanitarian crises. In addition, the adoption of the Memorandum on the equal treatment of refugees and other citizens of ECOWAS States had given fresh impetus to the spirit and objective of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to free movement of persons, residence and establishment, while the UNHCR 10-Point Plan had been taken into account in the ECOWAS plan for the implementation of the common ECOWAS policy on migration. Cooperation with UNHCR, particularly in capacity-building programmes, had also facilitated the implementation of the Protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security, adopted in 1999, and the implementation and operation of the early warning system incorporating humanitarian indicators. Lastly, the recommendations formulated at the Regional Conference on Refugee Protection and International Migration in West Africa, held in Dakar on 13 and 14 November 2008, would result in the rollout of field-level programmes and projects benefiting the Community in the near future.

39. **Mr. Maalim** (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) explained that his organization, which was a regional grouping of seven East African States, considered the issue of refugees and other persons, including asylum-seekers, returnees, IDPs and resettled IDPs, from the angle both of development and security. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) treated the issue of refugees and other displaced persons very seriously because the subregion hosted around 10 million refugees – probably the highest figure in the world. The Authority worked very closely with UNHCR both regionally and at its headquarters in Djibouti and had recently included UNHCR in the IGAD Partners Forum (IPF). It believed that in order to bring human displacement under control it was essential to work towards regional integration through poverty reduction plans that addressed the causes, including food insecurity and climate change, and through economic cooperation. However, it also recognized that refugee and IDP issues were international in nature and for that reason embraced a strategy of cooperation with all international agencies.

40. The Authority was calling for a review of the Memorandum of Understanding that it had signed with UNHCR in 1997 to reflect the changes that had taken place over the past

12 years. It would also like to see the resolutions concerning the management of population movements that were adopted at a regional conference of ministers held in Nairobi in February 2006 being put into practice. The Authority was working with UNHCR to control HIV/AIDS at six refugee camps and two returnee/IDP camps in IGAD member States. To date, funds totalling US\$ 1,163,050 had been assigned to UNHCR and a further 4 million dollars would be disbursed soon. However, IGAD called upon other actors to come on board that still very small-scale initiative, not only to extend its coverage but also to expand its scope to other areas of assistance, such as the effort to eliminate tuberculosis and malaria.

41. **Mr. Helle** (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that securing access to civilian populations who were experiencing direct attacks, living under general insecurity or subject to tight curfews and military controls had been a daily challenge for many humanitarian organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Official heavily populated camps were sometimes only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond the camps, the most vulnerable fended for themselves and when access to them was restricted, as frequently occurred in conflict situations, crises and needs went unseen. For that reason, ICRC sought to establish a dialogue with all parties concerned in situations of armed conflict, reminding them of their obligations to respect and protect civilians and civilian property. In doing so, it endeavoured to mitigate the impact of armed conflict on civilians and thus help prevent the conditions that forced people to flee their homes. At the same time, ICRC sought to strengthen the resilience and self-reliance of affected communities, enabling them to remain in their homes through the provision of health posts, medicines, clean water, seeds and tools, and if necessary, food assistance. It also put a major emphasis on protecting and assisting those who had been uprooted and each year assisted several million displaced people in acute emergencies and in protracted situations who had varying needs and were vulnerable in different ways. In 2008 alone, some 3.7 million IDPs had benefited from the activities of ICRC.

42. Given the new responsibilities entrusted to UNHCR in the context of the cluster approach in regard to IDPs, ICRC and UNHCR were increasingly active in the same contexts, for the same beneficiary groups. In addition to their daily contacts in the field, they should therefore pursue and intensify their dialogue with a view to ensuring that they adopted a truly complementary approach, based on the comparative advantages of each. Besides seeking to avoid duplication, collaboration should aim to identify ways of operating in a mutually reinforcing manner, for the benefit of those when both organizations sought to protect and assist.

43. **Mr. Linde** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) was pleased to announce that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) had finalized its global policy on migration. The policy had been adopted by the IFRC Governing Board in May 2009 and would be further considered at the IFRC General Assembly in Nairobi in November 2009. The policy would enhance the coherence, effectiveness and predictability of the movement-wide response of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in providing assistance and protection to migrants in the broad sense of the term, including asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons, whatever their legal status, and create a stronger and wider consensus on the humanitarian response to migration.

44. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent had a long-standing partnership in many regions of the world. The Office had recognized the National Societies' special nature as auxiliaries to public authorities in their countries. The cooperation between IFRC, UNHCR and the international community had moved a step further in 2009, particularly in regard to mixed migration flows. With IOM, IFRC had co-organized a round table in Tunis on "Different People, Different Needs", which was related to the implementation strategy of

the UNHCR 10-Point Plan of Action on Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration. The work of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was based on an integrated approach to needs and vulnerabilities, which aimed to ensure that the individual needs of migrants were recognized and addressed, irrespective of their status. Legal categorization was not an end in itself, but a means to determine levels of vulnerability, to design strategies for an effective humanitarian response, and to empower and support migrants. Along the migratory trails, as well as in countries of origin and arrival, increasingly restrictive administrative and legislative measures were being adopted to reduce migration, further reducing migrants' access to basic protection and assistance. It was therefore all the more important that humanitarian actors, and first and foremost National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, had the right and the means to provide the humanitarian services that were due to all human beings.

45. **Ms. Haque** (United Nations Volunteers programme) said that, worldwide, 10 and a half million refugees were currently under the responsibility of UNHCR and 14 and a half million IDPs benefited from its protection and assistance. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme paid tribute to the tireless efforts of UNHCR and was proud to work hand-in-hand with it throughout the world, including in Sudan, Syria and Colombia. In 2008, 1,000 United Nations volunteers, half of whom were women, had worked alongside UNHCR in 74 countries. Free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity were the foundation of volunteerism and of UNV. Volunteerism served the cause of peace and development by enhancing opportunities for participation by all, particularly women and girls. Since its establishment in 1970, UNV had always supported the UN system by mobilizing volunteers for peace and development all over the world. Almost 8,000 volunteer assignments had been undertaken in 2008 alone.

46. In its resolution 63/153 of February 2009, the General Assembly had designated UNV as the focal point for follow-up of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The General Assembly had also decided that, on or around 5 December 2011 (the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development), two plenary meetings of the sixty-sixth session would be devoted to follow-up on IYV and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary. That discussion would be especially relevant in the lead-up to 2015, the target date for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Accordingly, UNV sought the support of UNHCR, United Nations agencies, civil society partners and countries in the preparations for 2011 and beyond, and in raising awareness about the contribution of volunteerism to peace and development.

47. **Ms. Campbell** (American Refugee Council) said that her statement had been drafted in consultation with, and was delivered on behalf of, a wide range of NGOs, and aimed to reflect the diversity of views within the NGO community. The NGO community wished to express its concern over ongoing emergencies, to highlight the shrinking of the scope for protection available to refugees, and to emphasize the changing nature of the humanitarian response. In Sri Lanka, some 260,000 IDPs lived in camps in the north of the country where they were deprived of their freedom of movement, in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions and under the control of the military. Restrictions on freedom of movement for IDPs remaining in the camps must be removed without delay to enable free access to services and livelihoods outside the camps and full engagement of humanitarian agencies inside the camps. In Pakistan, the international community had struggled to provide assistance to the 80 per cent of IDPs living with families. The NGO community called on all actors involved to work to ensure the full participation of local NGOs in the response effort. Donors should contribute to the UN consolidated appeal as a matter of priority. Returns must be fully voluntary and based on a free and informed choice.

48. The NGO community was concerned about the complex humanitarian emergency unfolding in Yemen, where around 150,000 civilians, including at least 55,000 to 75,000

children, had been displaced. It shared UNHCR's concerns over the situation in Sa'ada city, where civilians, including 35,000 IDPs, remained trapped by intermittent clashes, lacked water and electricity, and had faced fuel and food shortages for over a month. In Somalia, the cumulative number of conflict and climate IDPs had reached 1.5 million. Humanitarian funding should be committed in order to build up the capacities of national staff and Somali agencies to respond to disasters. Although insecurity still restricted access by aid agencies, national staff and national NGOs continued to deliver emergency assistance, including food aid. Those efforts must be strengthened and supported. In the Palestinian territories, NGOs remained deeply concerned about the ongoing blockade of Palestinian civilians, which had locked in 1.5 million people, two thirds of whom were refugees and most of whom were stateless, in one of the most densely populated areas on earth.

49. The NGO community was also deeply concerned about the interception and refoulement policies of many countries. Hundreds of people trying to reach Italy had been intercepted in international waters and immediately returned to Libya without consideration for their protection needs. The previous year, 28 migrants had been killed by Egyptian police when attempting to cross the border into Israel. The Israel Defense Forces had engaged in a policy of immediate refoulement. The NGO community called upon Italy and Israel to end their refoulement policies. In addition, Governments and other relevant actors concerned had too often denied access for humanitarian organizations, even though they were obliged to facilitate humanitarian response under international law. The number of incidents that had claimed the lives of humanitarian staff had also risen sharply. With climate change set to become a major driving force behind forced displacement, because it would increase the severity of natural hazards, it was critical that UNHCR engaged energetically and proactively on that issue.

50. The NGO community welcomed the imminent signature of an African convention on the rights of IDPs. It also welcomed the development of IDP profiling methods. It encouraged UNHCR and Executive Committee member States to step up their efforts to systematically collect data on the plight of IDPs. Despite the existence of the UNHCR Guidelines on Detention, NGOs had observed an increase in the use of detention to control migratory flows. Governments should explore alternatives to detention. The NGO community was in the process of developing a handbook on such alternatives.

51. The Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) initiative was a critical tool for ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups during all phases of humanitarian emergencies. The NGO community was pleased with the progress made in some areas since the launch of the initiative, but much more work was needed to ensure that the initiative was fully institutionalized and implemented in every phase of programme planning. Lastly, persons with disabilities continued to be largely ignored, misunderstood and excluded from humanitarian aid. The NGO community urged UNHCR to take immediate steps to ensure their protection and assistance. It was also urgent and essential to raise the awareness of humanitarian actors and to develop a common framework for action. In 2010, disability should be the theme for World Refugee Day and for an Executive Committee Conclusion.

52. In conclusion, while NGOs strongly supported the expansion of European resettlement programmes, those programmes must not come at the expense of protecting asylum-seekers. With regard to the situation in the Somali refugee camps in Dadaab in Kenya, NGOs urged the Kenyan authorities to provide land for the building of a new camp.

53. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), replying to the representative of IOM, was pleased to note the extremely high level of cooperation and trust established between IOM and UNHCR and the effectiveness of their cooperation. Addressing the representative of ECOWAS, he expressed his admiration for the exceptional work that ECOWAS had carried out, especially in preventing conflicts and maintaining and

consolidating peace. In that regard, he believed that the Protocol relating to free movement of persons, residence and establishment and the Memorandum on the equal treatment of refugees and other citizens of the Community constituted a particularly favourable framework for the protection of refugees and the formulation of solutions for their benefit. Addressing the representative of IGAD, he praised the exemplary partnership existing between the two organizations at the regional level, which had allowed for the establishment of ongoing contacts and dialogue that would facilitate management of the situation in Somalia. He agreed with the Executive Secretary of IGAD that the Memorandum of Understanding signed required review.

54. Addressing the representative of ICRC, he emphasized the quality of the dialogue between the two organizations at the field level, praising in particular their shared commitment to working in synergy and preventing duplication of effort. Addressing the IFRC and ICRC representatives, he said that their cooperation as co-leads of the emergency shelter cluster was highly appreciated and that UNHCR acknowledged that the sphere of protection for population movements of all kinds had been greatly ameliorated by IFRC activities in the field of migration. Addressing the representative of UNV, he praised the remarkable achievements of the many United Nations volunteers working throughout the world and expressed his deep appreciation for their support, which helped ensure the quality of UNHCR initiatives. Lastly, addressing the representative of the American Refugee Council and, by extension, the entire NGO community, he gave his assurances that each of the points raised in her statement, and their implications, would be given careful consideration. He emphasized that the NGO movement, IFRC/ICRC and United Nations agencies, bodies and programmes were the three cornerstones of the humanitarian architecture and that their work should be viewed as a strategic partnership with UNHCR based on equality, mutual respect and integrity that sought to maximize the benefits for all persons under their shared responsibility.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.