



# General Assembly

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## Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Sixtieth session

### Summary record of the 635th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 1 October 2009, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Dumont ..... (Argentina)

*Later:* Ms. Millar (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Australia)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.*

**Reports relating to programme and administrative oversight and evaluation**

(A/AC.96/1070 and 1071) (*continued*)

1. **Ms. Wijgers** (Netherlands) asked whether the Policy Development and Evaluation Service intended to evaluate the High Commissioner's initiative on protracted refugee situations and expressed satisfaction with the clarifications provided on the distribution of tasks in programme evaluation and monitoring. She asked whether the strengthening of the Service would be supported by the allocation of additional resources.
2. **Ms. Norton** (Canada), emphasizing the need for balance between the compliance-based approach to follow-up on evaluation recommendations and other methodologies, asked whether the compliance model would still be used and, if not, how UNHCR would systematically assess whether lessons learned and best practices were being fed back into the organization. With the renewed focus on country-level evaluations, would thematic evaluations still be undertaken? She also echoed the question of the representative of the Netherlands about funding.
3. **Ms. Himanen** (Finland), recalling the importance of receiving feedback on evaluations so that lessons could be learned, enquired about the independence of the UNHCR evaluation mechanism. If evaluations were to be increasingly carried out at country level, would funds be allocated from headquarters or from field offices? Would field offices be able to provide them?
4. **Ms. Gaertner** (United States of America) expressed support for the work of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service, particularly with regard to Iraqi and Burundian refugee populations and urbanization issues. She said that she would submit suggestions for future evaluation projects in the near future. She emphasized the need for concrete follow-up to evaluation recommendations to help UNHCR improve its performance. Senior management should continue to focus on that area. Affirming her Government's commitment to working with the Service as it implemented its new evaluation policy, she asked how it would adapt to its augmented responsibilities.
5. **Mr. Crisp** (Head of the Policy Development and Evaluation Service), responding to points made, reaffirmed his Service's commitment to evaluate the High Commissioner's initiative on protracted refugee situations by the end of 2010. Further information on that evaluation would be provided at the meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in December 2009. A decision on the resources to be allocated to the Service for its additional responsibilities had yet to be finalized, but the capacity of the Service had in any case increased with the doubling of the evaluation function over the previous five years.
6. Responding to the comments by the representative of Canada, he explained that he was fully in favour of a mechanism to monitor compliance with evaluation recommendations but considered that an analytical report would be much more useful than one trying to quantify compliance in percentage terms. On the issue of thematic evaluations, the clear shift towards country-level evaluations was intended to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness, although thematic evaluations would not be abandoned altogether. In response to the representative of Finland, he explained that, while the Service did not establish its programme of work independently but rather in close consultation with senior management, it did have a high degree of autonomy when it came to methodology and evaluation policy, an arrangement which served as a powerful safeguard against management interference in the Service's findings, no instances of which had occurred during his tenure. With respect to funding, he said that, as evaluation activities were

financed centrally, there was no need for resources to be sought from regional or country offices. Lastly, he welcomed specific suggestions for evaluation activities.

### **Consideration and adoption of the Biennial Programme Budget 2010–2011**

(A/AC.96/1068 and Add.1)

7. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the proposed Biennial Programme Budget 2010–2011 and the Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, as contained in documents A/AC.96/1068 and A/AC.96/1068/Add.1 respectively. The documents had been reviewed by the Standing Committee during informal consultations and at its forty-sixth meeting. Document A/AC.96/1068 also contained the draft general decision on administrative, financial and programme matters, which the Standing Committee had discussed at the meeting and informally.

8. **Mr. Johnstone** (Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) gave a presentation on the proposed Biennial Programme Budget 2010–2011, which had been prepared based on the Global Needs Assessment so as to respond to the needs of beneficiaries to the extent possible, within the limits of the organization's programme implementation capacities. He drew attention to the geographical and thematic areas to which most resources were allocated and stressed that the final figures for 2011, in particular, would depend on levels of funding and activities carried out in 2010. If new projects were delayed until 2011, for example, the associated start-up costs would likewise be deferred. He drew attention to some aspects of a new software program being used by the Office for budgeting, certain features of which would be made available to member States in due course.

9. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco), recalling his country's political and financial support for the UNHCR reform process and the need for maximum operational efficiency, stressed the importance of political will on the part of host countries and countries of origin in improving the lot of refugees. He welcomed the progressive introduction by UNHCR of strategic information technology applications in 74 countries and encouraged UNHCR to extend the use of the "ProGres" registration software to all host countries, including as a means of improving security. To that end, the Division of Information Systems and Telecommunications should be restructured and some of its functions decentralized.

10. Providing protection for refugees and other persons of concern was a major challenge, given the difficulty of predicting needs and the complexity of displacement situations. He encouraged UNHCR to generalize the Global Needs Assessment strategy from the 2010–2011 biennium, preferably with greater involvement of regional and field offices in evaluating needs. He also encouraged the organization to continue refining its Global Strategic Priorities over the coming two years as a contribution to results-based management, and he expressed support for the seven priority objectives identified by the High Commissioner.

11. The integrated approach to sustainable solutions, as established under the 2002 protection agenda, remained valid. He welcomed recent achievements in finding solutions for large numbers of refugees in several countries and encouraged UNHCR to continue its efforts. He noted, however, that the approach would inevitably increase pressure on the organization's Rehabilitation Service, which should be strengthened and adequately resourced.

12. Recent years had seen an increase in terrorist attacks in which UNHCR staff had often lost their lives in the line of duty. He roundly condemned such acts. UNHCR should be provided with sufficient resources to protect its staff in the field, and he fully supported the policy of harmonizing security systems for staff of humanitarian agencies. Despite the overall decrease in refugees worldwide, the number of populations of concern to UNHCR was rising, and he therefore supported the High Commissioner's call for increased budget

allocations for regional programmes, global programmes and headquarters. Given the need for the organization to be able to respond flexibly to emergency situations, he also supported an increase in reserve funds. He expressed support overall for the proposed Biennial Programme Budget 2010–2011. The proposed revision of the Financial Rules, however, required further discussion, and he requested the secretariat to organize informal consultations for Executive Committee members, with a view to reaching agreement before the end of 2009. UNHCR should have more flexibility in its financial management, but its Financial Rules should be compatible with those of the United Nations, particularly if UNHCR wished to comply with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards.

13. Morocco had demonstrated its commitment to humanitarian causes in general, and UNHCR in particular, by increasing its voluntary, non-earmarked contributions to the organization for the second year running. He called on all States to earmark as few of their contributions to UNHCR as possible to allow for greater flexibility. He supported the draft decision referred to by the Chairperson.

14. **Mr. Mulrean** (United States of America) expressed appreciation to UNHCR for the consultations and updates on its groundbreaking reform agenda and applauded the encouraging progress made to date. The reforms instituted must become an integral part of the organization's practice. His Government would continue to follow the process carefully to ensure that changes benefited the organization and its beneficiaries.

15. Given the unprecedented demands for UNHCR assistance, the Office should assess the legal, policy and resource implications of trying to address displacement driven primarily by environmental factors, and focus its activities strategically based on its protection mandate. Protection from persecution and from the effects of conflict must take priority. He echoed the caution of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions about the need to ensure that the new UNHCR budget structure did not lead to increased earmarking of resources and loss of flexibility. The "pillar" structure would enable UNHCR to diversify its donor base, but the organization must further clarify the elements in the reintegration pillar, including exit strategies.

16. The introduction of the Global Needs Assessment responded to long-standing calls for needs-based budgeting and would provide a clearer picture not only of requirements but also the consequences of failing to meet them. Consistent prioritization would be key to the success of that process, including the mobilization of donor support, and the Global Strategic Priorities and Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement would serve as good starting points. Realistic targets that were not based solely on a fully funded budget should be set to ensure realistic performance evaluation.

17. With regard to decentralization, staff, partners and donors required clear guidance and consistent messages from both headquarters and field offices to ensure oversight and accountability in the process. He requested clarification on how the approach of setting budget targets for operations in each country, introduced against the possibility of a budget shortfall in 2010, would be applied over the course of the year, and urged UNHCR to temper the expectations of staff, partners and beneficiaries in order to avoid any disappointment that could threaten the Global Needs Assessment approach. Although administrative expenditure should be kept under review, all needs, including at headquarters, should be taken into account in future assessments.

18. **Mr. McFarlane** (Australia) said that the changes to the UNHCR budget structure were likely to increase the effectiveness and transparency of the organization's work. He encouraged donors to take the opportunity provided by the new structure to provide additional funding to the organization. Although such significant changes would involve a period of readjustment, UNHCR should continue working on a rigorous, pragmatic and

transparent prioritization process based on beneficiary needs and humanitarian considerations.

19. **Ms. Aderhold** (Germany) expressed full support for UNHCR reform, the new budget structure, and the proposed Biennial Programme Budget 2010–2011 and said that she encouraged UNHCR to moderate financial expectations and broaden its donor base, as mobilizing the required resources from traditional donors might prove difficult. She anticipated a transparent and inclusive prioritization process guided by Global Strategic Priorities, which were a valuable tool and would be regularly adjusted to take account of changes in humanitarian need. Prioritization was essential, particularly in the current economic climate.

20. **Mr. Johnstone** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the Office appreciated the strong support for the Global Needs Assessment approach and for the budget and had taken note of the words of caution offered. In view of past experience, UNHCR was mindful of the need to contain spending to keep pace with funding and to ensure that expectations matched realities.

21. He thanked Morocco for supporting the increase in new or additional mandate-related activities funding approved by the Standing Committee for the launch of a number of important programmes that required additional budgetary allocations. The Office was now considering how to increase the capacity of its resettlement structures.

22. In view of the apparent misunderstandings over the reference in the UNHCR Financial Regulations and Rules of the reference to consistency with the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, he explained that the reference had been removed, as there was a discrepancy between the application dates in the International Public Sector Accounting Standards compliance timetable. The reference had also been removed to ensure that the Office would not be violating its own rules.

23. The United States delegation had emphasized the importance of evaluation and oversight; it had been decided that sound evaluations, accountability frameworks and audits were all essential to keep UNHCR on track; and action was being taken accordingly. Questions about prioritization would remain; he urged Committee members to refrain from earmarking funding now that the budgetary process was more visible and to bear in mind the need to maintain flexibility. Although some delegations had urged the Office to apply the Global Needs Assessment to headquarters costs, it was important to right-size and contain headquarters costs in order to ensure that the organization remained lean.

24. He had taken due note of the positive remarks made by the representatives of Australia and Germany and of the note of caution that they had sounded. Prudence was key to the success of UNHCR reforms and the informed budgeting process. Based on a modest and reasonable Global Needs Assessment, the Office had substantially revised its projections on beneficiaries' needs. He recalled, however, that it was essential to establish a baseline if results-based management was to be effective.

25. A needs-based approach was being taken to the Consolidated Appeals Process that would lead to convergence with the Global Needs Assessment; any discrepancies in budget projections due to differences in approach could be resolved on a country-by-country basis.

26. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had asked the Office to specify in future budgets the savings that resulted from the reform process; to date, the Office had documented the savings for donors. The Advisory Committee had also requested further information on the justification for strengthening the capacity of the Supply Management Service to maintain, procure and deploy stocks expeditiously. The information was available to the Executive Committee and to other interested parties.

27. During his term of office, UNHCR had put in place the most comprehensive set of reforms of any international organization. He commended staff for implementing those

reforms while continuing their regular work. The reforms, once consolidated, would serve as a platform from which to take the Office to new levels. He envisaged a reformed UNHCR that was nimble and lean, with state-of-the-art competencies and staff who had confidence in their leaders and who felt honoured to serve a gender-sensitive organization that played a leadership role in bringing together the United Nations family, the international community and civil society to serve their common humanitarian goals. In that connection, UNHCR should broaden its donor base to meet the needs of beneficiaries and play an appropriate role in efforts to address the causes of conflict and to restore faith in humanitarian intervention. The current reform process was a first step towards realizing that vision.

28. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the approval of the budget and support for the efforts of UNHCR were a gift to the Deputy High Commissioner, whom he commended without reservation for his exceptional human qualities, high moral standards, solidarity and generosity, which would be hard to replace.

29. *Ms. Millar (Australia), Vice-Chairperson, took the chair.*

#### **Review of the annual consultations with non-governmental organizations**

30. **Ms. Campbell**, Rapporteur of the Annual Consultations with Non-Governmental Organizations, said that efforts had been made to restructure the Annual Consultations, as a number of issues dominating the humanitarian agenda needed deep and regular discussion. Longer workshop sessions had been held, at the 2009 meeting of the Annual Consultations on urban refugees and on protracted situations, with a view to generating clearer recommendations and action points to share with the Executive Committee.

31. The main issues discussed at the 2009 Annual Consultations included the changing humanitarian landscape and the need for new humanitarian response models to be differentiated and tailored to the requirements of specific disasters. Humanitarian organizations faced a number of new challenges, including those posed by the fact that, increasingly, displaced populations lived in urban areas. Moreover, the fact that displaced urban refugees tended more and more to live with host families created challenges, including with regard to information flows and the security risks of local humanitarian personnel. In addition, with the shrinking of humanitarian space, many operations were run from a distance and were increasingly reliant on local partners. The prevalence of integrated missions placed humanitarian organizations under the control of political and military institutions, blurring the line between civil and military providers of aid. Other significant issues mentioned during the Annual Consultations were the prevalence of mixed migration flows, climate change and related displacement.

32. Non-governmental organizations had called for the Office to do more to fulfil its mandate in respect of statelessness, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, and had raised concerns about the erosion of the principle of family unity, including, in particular, in the context of resettlement. Non-governmental organizations had called for protracted situations to be defined in qualitative terms and had emphasized the need to engage development actors in dealing with such situations to help achieve concrete results. Refugee rights must be realized early on, not only when durable solutions were under consideration, and registration was therefore crucially important. A more sustained focus on IDPs in protracted situations was also needed.

33. Non-governmental organizations had noted that providing protection and assistance to urban refugees would pose new challenges. Community-based organizations would need to play a greater role in meeting those challenges, while greater reliance on communication technologies for outreach and identification would be necessary to help overcome the problem of the lack of visibility of urban refugees. It was to be hoped that the cost of protecting and assisting such populations would be well reflected in the Global Needs

Assessment, and non-governmental organizations looked forward to working with UNHCR on the issue.

34. During the Annual Consultations, non-governmental organizations had called on the Executive Committee to consider drafting a conclusion on disabilities for 2010 and to keep a strong focus on profiling IDP populations as an essential tool of protection. They had also expressed the wish to be involved at all stages of the Global Needs Assessment process, including in developing priorities, and had raised concerns about security risks for national staff. In addition, at almost every session, attention had been drawn to the issue of protection for women and girls, and strong support had been expressed for the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming process.

35. **Ms. Birladianu** (Rapporteur, of the Executive Committee), said that the Committee had before it the report on the Annual Consultations with non-governmental organizations, which had been circulated as an informal document. There had been no specific proposals from NGOs on improving links between the Annual Consultations and the work of the Executive Committee; however, in her view it would be encouraging to see more Committee members attending the Consultations. She had observed that both the Executive Committee and NGOs had raised issues of common concern, including the Global Needs Assessment, protracted refugee situations, urban refugees, the erosion of humanitarian space and the security of humanitarian workers. Greater participation by the Committee in the Annual Consultations could only enrich the debate on those issues and highlight the value of NGO contributions.

36. **Ms. Aderhold** (Germany) said that her delegation appreciated the comprehensive report, which drew attention to urgent humanitarian needs and contained recommendations for action. Germany would continue to participate in the negotiations on the draft conclusion on protracted refugee situations, although a conclusion on disabilities was not yet on its agenda. The concerns expressed by NGOs about the lack of humanitarian space were timely and added another perspective to the discussion. Her Government attached great importance to working with NGOs on durable solutions and hoped that the capacity for fruitful cooperation between NGOs and UNHCR would be enhanced.

#### **Other statements**

37. **Mr. Avognon** (Chairperson of the Staff Council of UNHCR) said that he wished to present some key observations about selected aspects of the human resources reform under way at UNHCR. The High Commissioner had mentioned a number of areas, namely, appointments, postings, promotions, recruitment, contracts and conversions. Negotiations on staff participation in the process of appointments, postings and promotions had evolved and the Council continued to call for greater transparency and equity in the application of related policies. Numerous formal complaints continued to be submitted every year, due to a perceived lack of transparency in the promotions system, which the reform package needed to address. The terms and conditions of promotion to the "International Professional" category, as set out in the reform package, were not acceptable. Furthermore, the gap in career management services for General Service staff should be swiftly addressed and the new contract rules must be applied equitably.

38. Turning to the new system for the administration of justice, he welcomed the new system but was concerned that its management by the office of the Deputy High Commissioner could create a possible conflict of interests. He therefore called for a fair and unbiased management evaluation process.

39. The success of the human resources management reforms depended on the professionalization of the Division of Human Resources Management; the Staff Council urged the administration to appoint duly qualified and competent staff. There had been a number of signs, including a large number of complaints from staff, that confidence in that Division was low. As the Division would be in charge of implementing the reforms, the

Staff Council had written to the High Commissioner requesting an Office of Internal Oversight Services review of the Division, as a confidence-building measure for staff. UNHCR staff welcomed change, it was the process and agents of change which caused them concern. Lastly, the Staff Council welcomed the assurances provided by management that continuous efforts were being made to improve safety and security in the field.

40. **The Chairperson** praised the courage and dedication of staff, who were having to adapt to the reforms and without whom the work of the Executive Committee could not be carried out. The Committee relied on the Staff Council to keep them informed.

#### **Meetings of the Standing Committee in 2010**

##### **Consideration of the provisional agenda of the sixty-first session of the Executive Committee**

41. **The Chairperson** drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the draft decisions on the programme of work of the Standing Committee for 2010, on observer participation in meetings of the Standing Committee in 2009–2010 and on the draft provisional agenda of the sixty-first session, which had been circulated informally. If she heard no objection, she would take it that the Executive Committee wished to adopt those decisions, which would be included in the report of the Executive Committee on the work of the current session.

42. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.*